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The Everyday Practice and Performance of European Politics: An Ethnography of the European Parliament.

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Contemporary European Studies

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Statement:

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Acknowledgements:

In this thesis, an understanding of ethnographers as *bricoleurs* is presented. The researcher is understood as a jack-of-all-trades and research as an interactive process shaped by the setting and participants at that moment. Much of this can also be said of the doctoral process and experience. This thesis has been shaped by the people and places I have encountered during my journey which could not have been completed without the support, faith, and goodwill of those I would like to thank here. This research has also been supported materially by a generous Economic and Social Research Council 1+3 award (grant number ES/I/900934/1) for which I am grateful.

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Abstract:

This inter-disciplinary thesis takes an ethnographic approach to the European Parliament (EP) in order to bring actors, agency, and social context into the study of MEP behaviour. It explores how MEPs practice politics at the everyday level inside the EP. The study approaches politics as an activity performed on a daily basis by individuals within particular social spaces. It takes an individual level and holistic approach to MEP behaviour by exploring their everyday practice of politics inside this institution. The thesis attempts to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of MEP behaviour than is currently available in the literature.

The thesis primarily responds to gaps in the European Studies literature which mean we lack understanding of how MEPs practice politics within European structures as active, dynamic agents. The research design includes participant observation, elite interviews, and a survey. An inter-disciplinary theoretical framework is applied which combines tools from Goffman (1959), Wenger et al (2002), and Bourdieu (1990, 1977). It sees MEPs as actors accumulating capital and preparing backstage to give credible and thus persuasive performances to different audiences in this transnational political field and its habitus.

This research particularly explores the role of the national party delegations and EP groups in MEPs' everyday practice of politics and the local meanings generated around these structures. The key narrative woven throughout this thesis concerns their role from participants' perspective. This thesis finds that these structures play a vital support role and that they can be conceptualised as collegial communities of practice in which members routinely exchange knowledge with trusted colleagues to enable them to cope with the work environment they face and to pursue their chosen interests more successfully.

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List of Abbreviations:

AFCO	European Parliament's committee on Constitutional Affairs
AFET	European Parliament's committee on Foreign Affairs
AGRI	European Parliament's committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (group)
CoP	Community of Practice
DG	Directorate General
DG EXPO	Directorate General: External Policies of the Union
DG INLO	Directorate General: Infrastructure and Logistics
DG IPOL	Directorate General: Internal Policies of the Union
ECON	European Parliament's committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists (group)
EFD	Europe of Freedom and Democracy (group)
EMPL	European Parliament's committee on Employment and Social Affairs
ENVI	European Parliament's committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party (group)
EPP-ED	European People's Party – European Democrats (group)
EU	European Union
Greens/EFA	Greens – European Free Alliance group (group)
GUE-NGL	European United Left -Nordic Green Left (group)
LIBE	European Parliament's committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NI	Non-Attached MEPs
NPD	National Party Delegation
PPC	Perceived Preference Coherence
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
RCV	Roll Call Vote
REGI	European Parliament's committee on Regional Development
S&D	Socialists and Democrats (group)
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

Introduction:

Getting Closer to the Actors Doing European Politics: how do MEPs practice politics inside the European Parliament?

‘Star MEPs have more influence over the lives of European citizens and businesses than does any national parliamentarian, claims a senior Belgian MEP, “but the frustration for an MEP is that you can do an amazing European job and not get any media attention.” This frustration is acute at election time, when MEPs sally forth in search of voters, only to be reminded that the public knows little of who they are or what they do’
(The Economist: 4/6/2009).

1. Context, Aims, and Scope of the Inquiry

After an Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) seminar in February 2012, former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made headlines by stating that the European Parliament (EP) should be abolished after failing to achieve its purpose of bridging the divide between the European people and European Union (EU) (IPPR:21/2/2012). Straw said the EP should be replaced with an assembly of national parliaments because ‘there is a major democratic deficit within the EU ... the paradox is that as the EP has been given more powers it has become less, not more, legitimate and that is shown by the drop in the average turnout’ (in Wintour: 21/2/2012, Appendix 1). His remarks provoked an open letter from a coalition of EP supporters who pointed to MEPs’ successes on citizens’ behalf such as amending data protection, anti-discrimination, and chemicals testing legislation. The supporters expressed their disappointment in Straw’s resurrection of the low turnout ‘old chestnut’, arguing that ‘given European election campaigns that concentrate on national issues and a Eurosceptic media added to an impenetrable electoral system ... it is no surprise turnouts are low’ (in The Guardian:23/2/2012). Meanwhile Professor Simon Hix responded by arguing that evidence shows the EP handles a massive policy agenda and in most countries engages strongly with citizens (5/3/2012, see Schmidt:2005).

When I raised the democratic deficit with an EP official, he declared that the EP does not have a democratic deficit and that it may even have a democratic surplus, expressing frustration that academics always seem years behind developments in Brussels (Interview-26). However, former EP Secretary-General Julian Priestley (4/11/2010) has argued that whilst The Lisbon Treaty has tackled the democratic deficit, a continuing lack of public participation threatens the EU’s legitimacy. He has called for increased politicisation of the policy process to address the participation deficit. These debates and views reflect a distinction in the literature between formal democracy, which focuses on institutional

design, and substantive democracy which concerns maximising opportunities for individuals to influence the conditions in which they live (Kaldor&Vejvoda:1999 in Warleigh:2003:4). Chryssochoou (1998, 2007) differentiates these concerns between an institutional and socio-psychological perspective. This distinction is crucial in debates about the EU's democratic deficit which concerns decisions being 'insufficiently representative of or accountable to the nations and people of Europe' (Lord:2001 in Chryssochoou:2007:360).

Haller (2008) argues there is a growing split between European citizens and elites which is contributing to a widespread feeling that citizens have little influence in Brussels, and that the difficulty of seeing who is responsible for decisions is one reason for its growth. A key component of democratic accountability is for citizens to understand who is to blame and Hobolt (2012) has found that more informed citizens are better able to correctly assign credit and blame for outcomes (see Hobolt&Tilley:2013). The EP official also said, '...the internal procedures are so complicated. It's difficult to trace back who is responsible for what' (Interview-26). There needs to be more research and debate about where decisions are made in the EP, how, and by whom. Further research is required which gets closer to the actors 'making Europe' (Jenson&Mérand:2010:74) and 'doing politics' (Wodak:2009) in Brussels and their decision-making routines and processes.

This inter-disciplinary European Studies thesis combines tools from Political Science and Anthropology. It takes an ethnographic approach to the EP in order to bring actors, agency, and social context into the study of MEP behaviour. It gets closer to MEPs as actors 'doing' politics in their context, to provide a more nuanced understanding of how MEPs make decisions, perform role(s), and pursue interests inside this institution. This study aims to convey a deeper understanding of how MEPs practice politics within European structures as active, dynamic agents than is currently available in the literature.

Despite increased academic interest in the EP since the 1990s, there is still 'relatively little on the life of the Parliament' (Priestley:2008:xi). This thesis aims to open up this institutional black-box, illuminate activities and routines occurring inside, and to get closer to MEPs' perspectives on what they do in Brussels. The level of analysis and scope of the inquiry is individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics inside this institution. The study primarily aims to present a deeper understanding of MEP behaviour, as the everyday

practice of politics, than is currently available in the literature. It particularly focuses on the role of the national party delegation (NPD) and EP group in MEPs' everyday practice of politics and the local meanings generated around these structures. The project also explores how individual MEPs decide how to vote, perform multiple roles, and the opportunities and constraints they face in this transnational social space. Throughout, it endeavours to paint an accessible picture of this profession by analysing MEP behaviour as a social activity and 'politics as usual' (Wodak:2009).

2. Rationale

2.1 MEP Behaviour: a more holistic approach

The EP's powers have been continuously enhanced with each new EU treaty. It has become 'one of the world's most powerful elected chambers' and has consequently attracted increased academic interest (Hix et al:2003b:192). There is now a significant body of statistical work which analyses MEPs' behaviour in roll call votes (RCVs) (see Yordanova:2011). There is also an extensive collection of work which, through a wider range of theoretical and methodological approaches, explores a range of issues relating to MEP behaviour - such as socialisation (Scully:2005) and roles (Taggart&Bale:2006) - and examines processes occurring in particular internal structures, notably the committees (e.g. Neuhold:2001, McElroy:2006a, Whitaker:2011). However, what has remained missing from the European Studies literature is research that takes a more holistic approach to MEP behaviour. The term 'holistic' is used in two senses in this thesis which are outlined below.

Academic attention turned to analysing MEPs' voting behaviour as their influence in the EU policy process grew (Hix et al:2003b). This body of statistical work has made an invaluable contribution to the field by going a long way in explaining outcomes. However, as Wodak's research shows, this profession consists of more than just voting. Numerous other activities fill MEPs' time such as 'preparing, discussing, lobbying, negotiating, presenting, writing, formulating, revising, proposing, voting, persuading, travelling, shifting between languages, translating' and many others constitute 'politics as usual' (Wodak:2009:75). The literature lacks research that takes a more holistic approach to MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics, or as a profession, and this project aims to

begin to fill this gap. The term 'holistic' is firstly used to refer to a broader and more inclusive approach to, and understanding of, MEP behaviour as a social practice.

Meanwhile the extensive collection of research which takes a wider range of theoretical and methodological approaches to MEP behaviour, is fragmented and has taken a fragmented approach to the phenomenon. Research has tended to focus on specific issues or examine processes occurring in particular internal structures. What has remained elusive is an 'elaborate theory' of MEP behaviour and the links between MEPs and the committees, NPDs, and groups (Yordanova:2011:608) which fathoms the mechanisms through which the relationships between them work and how influence is exerted (Coman:2009). Ringe's (2010) study, which investigates how individual MEPs decide how to vote, begins to address this deficiency. He argues that EP politics revolves around information and his Perceived Preference Coherence (PPC) mechanism highlights the existence of a dynamic decision-making process based on the exchange of information between legislative experts and non-experts (2010:3). Expertise gained by MEPs in the committees guides their non-expert group colleagues resulting in group cohesion. This thesis takes a 'holistic' approach, secondly, by exploring how MEPs practice politics and play the political game in this social context, rather than focusing on a particular issue or structure.

This thesis aims to provide an understanding of MEP behaviour as a social practice. As Favell and Guiraudon have said:

'We need to home in on the very real individuals who experience and live out at a micro level the consequences of macro-level regional integration. Our goal must be to show how their actions and embodiment of Europe as an everyday practice aggregate somehow into the familiar political, institutional ... structures we already know' (2009:569).

Ethnography, with its actor-centred and context-sensitive approach, has much to offer this endeavour. This study explores backstage routines (Goffman:1959) and how MEPs practice politics within European structures as active, dynamic agents. It particularly focuses on interactions occurring within the NPDs and groups and between actors and these structures in context. The project draws on the Anthropology of the EU (Shore:2000, Demossier:2011) and a strand of research by scholars taking a sociological approach to European integration (Favell&Guiraudon:2011, Georgakakis:2010, Adler-Nissen:2009). It is crucial we further explore the EP's internal organisation and MEPs' behaviour within it,

because it shapes MEPs' ability to represent citizens (Yordanova:2011). Ethnographic immersion enables us to explore actors' behaviour in context and to contribute to the literature by enabling us to appreciate heterogeneity, causal complexity, dynamism, contingency, and informality – without losing sight of the normative concerns which motivate researchers and audiences (Schatz:2009:11), discussed below.

2.2 Getting Closer to the Actors Making Europe

This thesis also responds to and was motivated by the wider lack of knowledge about what MEPs do in Brussels. Abélès (1993) found journalists had long given up covering the EP due to the dual seat arrangement and EP's complexity. An MEP told him, 'the very site of the parliamentary sessions, with its kilometres of corridors, itself symbolises the complexity of the institution' (in Abélès:1993:2-5). After a week shadowing MEPs, BBC journalist Brian Wheeler said:

'Beyond those people who are paid to cover it, few people in Britain really know what goes on in Brussels and Strasbourg. There are 78 British Euro MPs but most people would be hard-pressed to name one of them ... let alone the ones that are paid to represent them. Most of the time people only tend to take notice of the EP when there is an election ... or when a British MEP is embroiled in a financial scandal, or when there is a story about crazy Eurocrats and their silly rules ... few could really say they know what these well-paid elected representatives actually do' (13/1/2009).

Despite its formal empowerment, the EP has retained a relatively low public profile and faces significant challenges with regards to connecting citizens to the EU (Scully:2007). Reflecting on The Lisbon Treaty, Andrew Duff MEP (rapporteur for electoral reform) has lamented that 'for all its new authority parliament is still unloved' (Banks:9/11/2010). Whilst Lisbon gave the EP significant new powers, it did not do enough to strengthen its popular legitimacy (Banks:12/1/2011) and Duff says; 'the constitutional set-up of the EU is largely unknown by its citizens. Its 'government' is complex and confusing ... The EU is known more for its law and bureaucracy than for its justice and democracy' (in Banks:9/11/2010). This lack of familiarity is apparent in recent Eurobarometer (2012) research¹ which finds that across the EU-27 that 53% of people are aware of the EP; 33% are not aware of any EU institutions; and 73% 'know little' about EU leaders and the

¹ 1,301 UK and 26,622 EU-27 citizens were interviewed in June 2012.

people who run the institutions². This suggests support for Duff's statement that '*Europe* is elsewhere out there' for many citizens (in Banks:9/11/2010).

Taggart and Bale say the EP is commonly perceived as 'home to a Euro-elite that is detached and unrepresentative' (2006:4) and Haller (2008) argues European elites and citizens are increasingly living in two different worlds (see Bourdieu:1991,1984 and Gledhill:1994:131-141). Wodak (2009) examines the democratic deficit with reference to a more general disillusionment with politics and politicians and the interdependency of the fields of politics, media, and economics. Briefly, she argues that the media encourages unrealistic expectations among citizens of politicians, as wise men with the capacity and 'creative power' to solve urgent problems which ordinary people cannot (2009:202). Peoples' expectations of politicians have changed so that we expect 'extraordinary ordinariness' and politicians to solve urgent problems in the face of complex global (economic) processes, but simultaneously to shed their elitist nature and be one of us the next moment (2009:161). The media is interested in crises, catastrophes, and conflicts rather than routines and therefore (political) stories are often simplified and sensationalised and about grand politics and personality, rather than process (2009:158). The images of politics people are routinely confronted with are highly ritualised performances, formal snapshots, and official images - a sanitised version which leaves out much of the simultaneous complexity and banality of politics as a profession (2009:18-19). There is therefore a need for scholars to open up the political field and explore 'politics as usual' - the everyday practice of politics which occurs backstage - to help to de-mystify this profession. This is an endeavour to which Anthropology has much to contribute (see Gledhill:1994, Schatz:2009).

3. Research Aims

This thesis takes an ethnographic approach in order to bring actors, agency, and social context into the study of MEP behaviour. It aims to get closer to MEPs as actors doing European politics as a social activity. The primary research question asks: how do individual MEPs practice European politics at the everyday level inside the EP? Through ethnography, the project takes an individual-level and more holistic approach to gain an in-depth understanding of MEP behaviour from the local perspective. As stated, it takes a

² In the UK, 22% are aware of the EP; 63% aren't aware of any institutions; and 83% 'know little' about EU leaders.

broader approach to MEP behaviour by approaching politics as an activity performed on a daily basis by individuals within particular social spaces. Ethnography thus expands how we understand the boundaries of the political when it is added to the Political Science toolbox (Schatz:2009:10, Wedeen:2010, Hilmer:2011). This thesis particularly focuses on the role the NPDs and groups play in MEPs' everyday practice of politics and the local meanings generated around these structures, and, having emerged from the field-site, these insights are central to the narrative presented.

Wodak urges scholars to 'turn to the backstage of politics, to investigate the intricate mechanisms of decision-making processes and to the inside workings of the political field' (2009:24). Ethnography has enabled me to explore how MEPs practice politics in this transnational political field. I conducted participant observation by being an intern for a UK MEP for seven months in 2010. I explored how MEPs cope with their work-context and how an agenda can be pursued successfully. I observed how MEPs' time and activities are organised so they can strategically pursue their interests. I saw how frontstage performances are prepared backstage and the ways in which performances are 'given' (Fine&Manning:2003:44-48) in different backstage communities of practice (CoPs) (Wenger et al:2002) to persuade non-experts of an (expert) MEP's position.

From my position, I participated in the political life of this institution to gain an understanding of the political game(s) being played and how influence is exerted by individual MEPs. Crucially, I experienced myself the vital support role the NPD and group structures play in MEPs' everyday practice of politics and why. Ethnography, an interpretivist approach, rejects the reductionism championed by positivism and celebrates the multiplicity, complexity, and richness of political life by exploring routines, resources, and motivations in-depth and interpreting actors' behaviour in the social context. It asks "how" and "why" rather than "what" or "which" questions. In this thesis, rather than seeking to predict or explain (particular) outcomes, I seek to convey a deeper and more holistic understanding of the everyday practice of politics by MEPs in this social context, and start, like Wodak, by assuming that politics is a highly context dependent activity (2009:26). This interpretivist research has been conducted with qualitative methods which enable the researcher to interpret subjective experiences or perspectives of the individuals being studied, to provide understanding of social reality and individuals' experiences of it (see Grix:2004:78).

This thesis sheds further light on three inter-related research issues which speak to debates in the European Studies literature. Firstly it explores how individual MEPs decide how to vote, by exploring routine knowledge management practices. I build on Ringe's (2010) Perceived Preference Coherence (PPC) mechanism by exploring the strict structuring of time in the EP by the official calendar and how this ubiquitous artefact facilitates the process of voting list construction within the groups. I explore more deeply how the dynamic exchange of information Ringe identifies occurs at the everyday level from the perspective of individual MEPs, and their dynamic interactions with these structures and other actors as part of the voting list construction process.

Secondly, the thesis explores how MEPs perform multiple roles at the everyday level. It explores how they negotiate the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands made of them by focusing on time management and how the performance of multiple roles is strategically planned and organised from the MEP office. The thesis sees MEPs as performing multiple roles by changing masks as they move between backstage CoPs. I build on Abélès' (1993) discussion of MEPs' dual legislative and representative function and Wodak's (2009) investigation of MEPs' multiplicity of orientations, by exploring the everyday organisation of MEPs' time and activities and how they pursue their aims inside this institution.

Thirdly, the thesis explores the opportunities and constraints individual MEPs face and practice politics within. It explores the context MEPs work in whilst pursuing their aims, and how an individual MEP can exert influence in processes and over outcomes in this transnational political field and its habitus. I draw upon Wodak (2009) and Adler-Nissen's (2009) recent applications of Goffman (1959) and Bourdieu's (1990, 1977) thinking tools to explore the EP as a transnational political field with an (enabling and constraining) system of dispositions and particular mix of capital, in which MEPs are positioned. In doing this, the thesis explores socialisation as developing a feel for the game.

4. Target Audiences

As an inter-disciplinary endeavour, combining tools from Political Science and Anthropology, this project potentially has wide appeal. However its primary aim is to provide a more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour to the European Studies

literature. European Studies – which is ‘an inherently interdisciplinary field’ (Favell&Guiraudon:2011:24, see Bourne&Cini:2005) – is therefore its primary target audience. European Studies scholars interested in MEP behaviour, EP group cohesion, EP politics, and EU policy-making will find it of interest. It may also appeal to those conducting research on EU staff, inter-institutional relations, and to those scholars pursuing a sociological approach to European integration within European Studies (Favell&Guiraudon:2011, Kauppi:2013).

Secondly, the study may appeal more widely to Political Scientists interested in Sociological New Institutionalism or interpretivist approaches to parties, legislatures, legislator roles, and decision-making in political institutions. The study thirdly aims to appeal to Anthropologists working on the EU and European integration. It responds to Abélès’ (1993) call for research to further explore MEPs’ dual function and explores how agents come to terms with and navigate European structures. It refers to *engrenage* processes in Brussels and organisational cultures in the EU institutions (Shore:2000, Abélès et al:1993). It may also appeal more broadly to political ethnography (Schatz:2009) and ethnographers interested in ‘studying up’ (Nader:1972).

Finally, this research contributes to interdisciplinarity, which, whilst many funders champion, few academics actually undertake for fear of being ‘a creature with no appropriate cage’ engaged in ‘intellectual nomadism’ (Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:8,165). The project is informed by European Studies and has used tools from Political Science and Anthropology but has produced something neither discipline could alone. I also hope that the findings might prove useful to practitioners and professionals working on democracy issues by providing accessible insight into how MEPs practice politics, pursue aims, and the opportunities and limitations they face while doing so.

5. Outline

This thesis proceeds and is structured as follows. Chapter 1 sets out the academic case for this research more fully. It takes stock and critically reviews the relevant literature, arguing that what is missing is research that takes a holistic approach to MEP behaviour. It reviews Ringe’s (2010) work on MEP behaviour which I build upon and a body of research seeking to get closer to European actors in Brussels.

Chapter 2 sets out the ethnographic methodology, demonstrating that the research design is 'fit for purpose' (Spencer et al:2003). It introduces ethnography and what it has told us about the EU and other political institutions. It then outlines the interpretivist research design which includes participant observation, elite interviews, and a survey. The chapter reflects on the key methodological issues which position this account, discussing the partial nature of ethnographic research and issues raised by the elite, political nature of the field-site. The detailed data collected through these methods is viewed through an iteratively constructed lens which combines tools and concepts which were found to illuminate processes experienced during fieldwork.

Chapter 3 outlines the inter-disciplinary theoretical framework which combines thinking tools from Goffman (1959), Wenger et al (2002), and Bourdieu (1990, 1977) as inspired by Wodak (2009) and Adler-Nissen's (2009) recent applications. This lens elucidates dynamic interactions between structures and agents. The chapter firstly outlines Goffman's dramaturgy metaphor and distinction between the front and backstage. The thesis approaches MEPs as actors preparing backstage to give credible frontstage performances to convince and persuade other actors of their position. Secondly, once we delve backstage inside organisations, we find co-existing communities of practice (CoPs). The chapter secondly introduces Wenger et al's (2002) CoPs which are collegial groups who share information on a regular basis to further a common domain. Thirdly, drawing on Bourdieu's thinking tools, I conceptualise the EP as a transnational political field and explore the habitus and doxa MEPs practice politics within, everyday strategies they employ, and valid types of capital available for accumulation by actors. The combination of Goffman and Bourdieu's thinking tools in this framework allows me to explore the attributes and resources which are required in this field to give supported performances to play the political game successfully.

This framework is woven throughout the five empirical chapters which follow. The structure of this thesis emerged from the field-site and my subsequent interpretation of my field-notes (see Chapter 2). Chapters 5-7 describe activities and routines occurring in three backstage CoPs which fieldwork revealed to be central to MEPs' daily endeavour inside this institution. They are bookended by Chapters 4 and 8 which explore more broadly this transnational political field and its habitus, the context in which MEPs practice politics and in which the three CoPs are embedded. Chapters 5-7 shed light on the first two research

issues, (how MEPs decide how to vote and perform multiple roles) whilst Chapters 4 and 8 are most relevant to the third (the opportunities and constraints MEPs face). To summarise:

- Chapter 4 introduces the social context in which MEPs practice politics and the three CoPs are embedded. It describes the *Brussels Bubble*, the field and habitus in which MEPs practice politics. It argues that MEPs have to learn to play the political game to pursue their aims successfully here. It takes time for MEPs to learn the rules of the game, acquire the appropriate disposition, and accumulate capital.
- Chapter 5 examines everyday life in the MEP office. It describes activities and routines occurring in this backstage CoP where frontstage performances are prepared and strategies developed. It argues that MEPs employ particular everyday strategies to cope with the work environment they face. This work place is characterised by constant movement, shortage of time, information overload, highly technical information, and bureaucracy. MEPs develop strategies to cope with this work context which include focusing and specialising on a narrow range of issues, re-contextualising these issues in different CoPs, and developing strategies to accumulate required knowledge.
- Chapter 6 investigates the role of MEP assistants. It investigates their activities, sources of information, and social and communication practices. It argues that assistants act as an ‘information interface’ within the office, filtering the information overload and interfacing with their MEP’s NPD and group to help prepare them to practice politics successfully.
- Chapter 7 further explores the role of the NPD and group in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics. It describes the process of group voting list construction and MEPs’ dynamic interactions with these structures. It argues that conceptualising the group as a CoP can help us understand the role these structures play in MEPs’ daily endeavour and decision-making processes.
- Chapter 8 then analyses the EP as a transnational political field, or system of power-related positions in which individual MEPs are positioned. It investigates the strategies MEPs employ to play the game successfully within the habitus and doxa. It argues MEPs accumulate particular types of capital in order to give supported performances and persuade other actors in the field of their position, and differentiates between political and legislative experts and expertise.

The Conclusion reflects upon the research question, the role of the group in MEPs' everyday practice of politics, and the three research issues which are woven throughout the thesis. It then discusses three messages that have emerged from this bricolage which speak to wider debates in the European Studies literature, relating to how we research the socialisation of MEPs, whether the EP is a normal parliament, and how approaching the EP as a normal work-place can help us understand MEP behaviour more deeply.

By focusing on agents, agency, and social context this thesis expands how we understand MEP behaviour (see Ripoll Servent&Busby:2013). The dense bricolage produced displays the simultaneous 'complexity and banality' of the everyday practice of politics by MEPs (Wodak:2009:206). In bringing a fresh approach, the project aims to do more than fill a gap in the literature. It encourages us to look differently at EP politics and the EU institutions as a social practice and as social fields respectively, to explore the role of actors more carefully, and to consider the wider potential contribution of our work in the context of a growing split between EU elites and European citizens.

Chapter 1:

Literature Review: MEP Behaviour in the European Parliament

‘Our understanding of EU politics – as it is conventionally described – is mostly limited to the picture created by political scientists, economists, and legal scholars. In this picture, the EU is either a depersonalised, self-sustaining institutional complex, or ... a battleground of super-individuals ... What is missing from our understanding of the EU is a human dimension. A sociological account makes clear what should be self-evident: the EU does not do anything by itself; it is people as everyday political agents who make the EU happen’
(Kauppi:2011:150).

1.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature on MEP behaviour and sets out what this research aims to contribute to it. It takes stock, identifies gaps to which this study responds, and discusses debates and strands to which it speaks. It thus positions the study and its approach in the field. I argue that the literature is missing a more holistic understanding of how individual MEPs practice politics at the everyday level inside the EP, but identify moves in this direction (Wodak:2009, Ringe:2010:26). Section 1 reviews the first generation of MEP research which analyses plenary behaviour. I highlight the key findings of normality and group cohesion and then identify the shortcomings of this approach, beginning to identify the gap to which this study responds. Section 2 explores the wider body of work on and approaches to MEP behaviour, and reviews debates to which this project contributes. Section 3 reviews Ringe’s (2010) illuminating study on how MEPs decide how to vote and describes how this project builds upon his findings. Section 4 then discusses scholarship calling for a more sociological approach to European integration, identifying this study with research strands which aim to get closer to European actors. Section 5 clarifies the contributions this project aims to make. Through ethnography it gets closer to MEPs as actors doing politics and provides a deeper and more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour. This addresses the gap indicated and is useful because it tells us more about how actors navigate and negotiate transnational structures as active, dynamic agents.

1.2 A ‘Normal’ Parliament: the first generation of MEP research

1.2.1 Increasing Powers, Increasing Research

The EP is the only directly elected international institution in the world. With the Commission and Council it is part of the EU institutional triangle. It oversees the Executive, scrutinises and in many areas contributes to legislation and budgets, and represents citizens (see Corbett et al:2011: Section 3). The EP was established in 1952 as the Common Assembly and held its first direct elections in 1979. It is elected every 5 years by over 500-million citizens. There are currently 766 MEPs, elected as representatives of over 150 national parties, sitting in seven transnational groups (Appendix-2) which have well developed organisational structures (Hix&Lord:1997, Lightfoot:2006, Bardi:2005). MEPs are members and substitutes of the EP's 20 permanent committees and 2 sub-committees, (whose composition broadly reflects plenary) and the EP's delegations, special committees, and inter-groups (McElroy:2006a). MEPs can also hold the following EP offices (President, Vice President, Quaestor, Committee or Delegation Chair, and rapporteur) and group offices (Leader, Vice President, NPD leader, co-ordinator, and shadow rapporteur) (see Corbett et al:2011, Judge&Earnshaw:2008).

To look at the EP's history is to see its powers gradually enhanced with each new EU treaty, the major check-points being well documented (see Appendix-3). The Lisbon Treaty again empowered the EP and further extended the co-decision procedure (Burns et al:2013, Europa: Treaty of Lisbon) and Corbett et al say the EU now has 'what amounts to a bicameral legislature' (2011:397). Rittberger (2005) finds the EP's empowerment has been due to its status as the only directly elected EU institution, its empowerment bringing legitimacy to the Union. Some scholars are now asking how the EP will adapt itself to rise to these new powers, a key question being where MEPs will get sufficient information to make decisions (Neuhold&Dobbels:2011:2). In merely 50 years, the EP evolved from a token multilingual talking-shop to a significant mainstream EU player (Scully:2007, Corbett et al:2003). Its empowerment has attracted academic interest, writing being 'a function of its powers and prestige'³ (Hix et al:2003b:192). Early scholarship described institutional development⁴ (Verzichelli&Edinger:2005:255) but attention turned to MEPs' voting behaviour as their influence grew, interest intensifying after Maastricht (1992) made the EP fully legislative⁵ (Noury:2002:34, Blomgren:2003:5, McElroy:2006a:7).

³ For detailed overviews of institutional development and research history see; Corbett et al:2011,2003, Judge&Earnshaw:2008, Scully:2007, Hix et al:2003b, Ripoll Servent:2011.

⁴ Historically there were four foci; historical development, elections analysis, inter-institutional relationships, and patterns of political competition (Verzichelli&Edinger:2005:255).

⁵ This has resulted in four key contemporary strands; development and functioning, political behaviour and elections, internal politics and organisation, and inter-institutional bargaining (Hix et al:2003b:193).

1.2.2 Plenary Voting Behaviour

Yordanova (2011) labels the body of statistical analysis of RCVs the ‘first generation’ of MEP research. This work has made a significant contribution to the field by going a long way in explaining outcomes. However it takes a narrow approach to MEP behaviour and EP politics, limiting its focus to RCVs at the expense of a broader approach to MEP behaviour and investigation of pre-plenary processes. The headlines are that the EP should be approached as a ‘normal’ parliament rather than a *sui generis* institution and that the NPD and group variables are the best predictors of outcomes.

These studies have found that despite high heterogeneity - MEPs being from different countries, cultures, languages, parties, and backgrounds - EP politics has become increasingly structured (Hix et al:2007:3). Studies find that the groups are cohesive, voting occurs along ideological rather than national lines, there is a traditional left-right cleavage, and a competitive multi-party system. The cohesion rates of the political groups have grown and are higher than those of the member-state delegations in all areas except agriculture. In fact, group cohesion is higher than for parties in the US Congress. These findings indicate ‘politics as normal’ and might come as a relief to those looking to the EP to alleviate the democratic deficit (McElroy:2006:179, and see Scully:2007, Hix et al:2007, Ringe:2010:1-5, Taggart&Bale:2006).

Perhaps the most important contribution is Hix et al’s (2007) extensive study of over 15,000 RCVs (1979-2004). They find that the cohesion of the EP itself has declined whilst group cohesion has grown with the EP’s powers, and argue that this has made the EP look increasingly like a normal parliament where cohesive parties compete to dominate outcomes and form coalitions for this purpose (2007:3). This well organised and competitive system has been gradually fashioned since 1979. They claim this is positive for European democracy and that democratic politics arrived in 2004 when the EP refused to elect Barroso’s proposed Commission, showing cohesive parties independent from national governments were a reality (2007:1-3, 218).

EP group cohesion is surprising for a number of reasons. A strong party-system requires cohesive parties to turn electoral promises into policy outcomes. Cohesion can be explained by legislative-executive relations or internal incentive structures. The EU is a

semi- or quasi- presidential rather than parliamentary system because the Executive does not need the EP's continued support, so the groups cannot discipline MEPs with the threat of government collapse. As for internal incentive structures, group leaders' degree of agenda control is limited because the Commission has the right of initiative; they have few disciplinary instruments because national parties control electoral lists; and they have limited control over rewards because offices are partly allocated by the proportional D'Hondt procedure (2007:5,87-91, Kreppel:2002, Ringe:2010:21). Despite these structural weaknesses, Hix et al conclude that; 'it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the European parties are able to discipline their [MEPs]' (2007:10). They deem the findings 'remarkable' and suggest:

'a particular explanation of political organisation and behaviour in the EP... [the results] suggest that the external and internal institutional context provides considerable, and increasing, incentives for the establishment of binding division-of-labour contracts (party organisations) between MEPs who have similar party-political preferences' (2007:104).

They argue that cohesion has grown with the EP's powers because MEPs have higher stakes in EU decision-making and therefore like-minded MEPs are incentivised to form stable transnational organisations and compete over EU policies, disciplining members to secure outcomes. One third of voting behaviour is determined by the group and two thirds by the NPD (2007:7). They argue MEPs nearly always vote with their NPD because national parties want to secure policy outcomes which reinforces the left-right cleavage (2007:145). However group cohesion has increased despite increased internal (national and ideological) diversity which should decrease group cohesion. They argue this indicates the groups are able to discipline MEPs and that NPDs have endowed the groups with leadership powers⁶ (2007:1-11,87-104). They say it is misleading to talk of two principals because there is strong congruence between the groups and their NPDs because 'the latter operate to make the European party act cohesively' (2007:146). They argue the groups discipline MEPs but 'our findings suggest that this happens mostly via the influence of national parties, which voluntarily choose to form European parties to promote their own policy goals, and then act collectively to secure these goals' (2007:10).

Numerous studies confirm the headline findings (Yordanova:2011, Hix&Noury:2009, McElroy&Benoit:2007, Hix et al:2006,2003a,2003b, Noury:2002, Hix:2002,2001,

⁶ Although MEPs usually follow the NPD over the group, revealed conflicts are 'extremely rare' (2007:145).

Kreppel:2002, Faas:2002, Raunio:2000, Kreppel&Tsebelis:1999, Hix&Lord:1996, Coman:2009). Quantitative research has offered further analysis of plenary. Votewatch (2010) found that ALDE is the 'kingmaker' when the EP splits along left-right lines and that competition between the centre-right and centre-left groups has increased in particular policy areas, and that the groups win more often in certain policy areas. In the absence of a permanent majority, relatively stable coalitions form in different policy areas⁷. In 2010 the EPP and S&D voted together 69% of the time but ALDE and S&D were the most likely coalition, voting together 79% of the time (Appendix-4).

1.2.3 Shortcomings and Gaps

This first generation of research goes a long way in explaining plenary outcomes, with important messages for democratic deficit and EU reform debates (Hix:2008, Hix&Høyland:2011). However it also has some important limitations. Firstly, by necessity, it is based on RCVs which have constituted only one third of plenary votes, are usually on resolutions rather than legislative texts, and can be requested strategically. RCVs are symbolic, unrepresentative, and one aspect of a complex organisational structure⁸ (Høyland:2010, Cicchi:2011, Carruba et al:2008, 1999, McElroy:2006:179). Secondly and more fundamentally, the research takes an extremely narrow approach and reduces MEP behaviour solely to not only plenary voting, but to RCVs. This project takes a much broader approach to MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics. Thirdly, by intensely analysing plenary votes, the research has focused on explaining outcomes to the detriment of understanding processes and has left us knowing 'surprisingly little' about backstage pre-plenary processes (Ringe:2010:1-5). An assistant insisted that plenary votes are almost the least interesting aspect of EP politics because by then, the decisions have been made, and to understand how the EP works, you have to look at the pre-plenary processes by which a dossier gets to the floor (Interview-22). Fourthly, this literature investigates aggregate level behaviour and obscures the experiences and perspective of individual actors operating within transnational structures. Finally, whilst this work routinely acknowledges rising levels of group cohesion, it has not been able to investigate how this is achieved at the everyday level. We know little about what these transnational

⁷ VoteWatch (2010) identified a winning centre-right coalition on economics, industry, development and international trade; a winning centre-left coalition on budget, civil liberties, environment and gender; and a winning grand coalition on agriculture, fisheries, foreign affairs, internal market and budgetary control.

⁸ Research may now benefit from Rule 166 which makes RCVs compulsory in final legislative votes (Høyland:2010:612). In 2012, AFCD voted against Andrew Duff's proposal to RCV final committee votes on legislative reports (Sebag:27/4/2012, VoteWatch:18/4/2012).

structures mean to local actors and little about the dynamic interactions occurring between them. We have therefore been left asking what mechanisms are driving cohesion and what they can tell us about discipline in other contexts – as McElroy says, our understanding of EU legislative politics remains in its ‘infancy’ (2006:176-8).

Yordanova (2011) calls for a second generation of research on the EP’s internal organisation because it has far-reaching implications for the EP’s ability to tackle the democratic deficit as it shapes MEPs’ ability to capitalise on the EP’s empowerment and represent citizens by translating preferences into legislation. Our knowledge has remained limited⁹ and Yordanova calls for research which goes beyond testing congressional theories to develop dynamic new theoretical accounts of the EP’s internal adaptation which consider external development (2011:606). We need to know more about how MEPs have dealt with their increasing workload and which actors have benefitted (also Farrell&Héritier:2004). However Yordanova assumes that further statistical analysis and modelling are the answer, referring to the development of time-series techniques and easier access to large longitudinal datasets (2011:613). Whilst I agree that we need to further explore the implications of the legislative organisation of the EP, I argue that qualitative methods and ethnography in particular, have an important role to play in future research aiming to provide further understanding of MEP behaviour.

1.3 Beyond Plenary: opening up the black-box

Whilst some of the post-Maastricht research might fall into this ‘first generation’ which uses statistical techniques to analyse plenary outcomes, there is a wider body of research which takes a more diverse range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the EP and MEP behaviour (see Blomgren:2003:5). We might refer to this as a second research generation. This body of work takes a broader approach to a wider range of issues and goes beyond plenary and begins to open up this institutional ‘black-box’ and reveal processes occurring inside (Bowler&Farrell:1995:220). Whilst this is crucial, I argue that because studies have focused on issues or particular structures, this body of work is fragmented and lacks a holistic approach to MEP behaviour inside this institution. This section reviews debates to which this project contributes.

⁹ Numerous scholars identify internal organisation as requiring further research; Coman:2009:1112, Raunio:2006:258, Verzichelli&Edinger:2005:255, Hix et al:2003b:197, Bowler&Farrell:1995, Kreppel&Tsebelis:1999:934.

1.3.1 Nationality, National Parties, and NPDs

Some qualitative and mixed methods research has explored nuances of MEPs' voting behaviour. This is crucial because RCVs 'do not tell the complete story' (Hix:2001:668). They have found nationality plays an important part in decision-making and have investigated the role of national parties and NPDs more deeply, although research in this area is inconclusive. This project contributes by further exploring the role of the NPD in the MEPs' everyday practice of politics and monthly routine (Chapters 5-7).

M.K. Rasmussen (2008) used interviews with Danish MEPs to discuss why they voted in certain ways. She found that national affiliation can play a more significant role than has been assumed (also Cicchi:2011). The policy area is an important factor for MEPs when deciding whether to vote with the member-state or group and abstention can be used as a tool by those experiencing conflicts. Rasmussen's research also found that rather than receiving too much direction from their national parties, MEPs find them to be 'quite uninterested' in their activities (2008:15), neglect which has been noted by other scholars.

Dafydd (2012) characterises national parties as 'disinterested principals'. Despite their theoretical ability to discipline MEPs, empirically they do not sanction MEPs because monitoring costs outweigh benefits¹⁰. Braghiroli's (2008) comparative work investigated whether national parties actually use sanctions by analysing MEPs' careers inside and outside the EP as a function of their allegiance to their NPD during conflicts. He found 7/12 NPDs fitted the retrospect sanctionary model. Raunio (2000) suggests that control by national parties has increased as the EP's powers have, but also finds that the degree varies and that it often depends on whether the party is in national government (see Kreppel:2002, Faas:2002).

Whitaker's review (2011:21-3) finds that other research on the level of direct influence over MEPs and their voting behaviour from national party leaderships also suggests that it is limited. Interview and survey research has found that MEPs have a high degree of autonomy from their national parties whilst practicing politics in Brussels (see Carter&Poguntke:2010). Whitaker's work follows Scully's (2001) theory that, rather than spending time scrutinizing their MEPs' activities regularly, national party leaderships

¹⁰ The paper only presented data so far from interviews with UK MEPs.

delegate authority to the NPD leaders in Brussels. Whitaker (2011) then argues that the EP's increased legislative role means national parties have greater incentive to care about the EP and to be involved in its committees, particularly those involved in co-decision, and shows that MEPs and national parties use the committee system to further policy goals.

Blomgren has investigated the impact of the NPD on MEP roles, exploring the cross-pressure MEPs experience between the national and European level. He examines how MEPs understand their role, organise their work, vote, and link with their national party. He found that many MEPs find their limited input into national politics frustrating. Their role selection is influenced by characteristics of the national arena but what really matters is 'principal perceptibility': how the national party engages with MEPs and how the relationship is designed (2003:310).

1.3.2 Legislator Roles

Other scholars have attempted to understand the multiple forces operating on MEPs as parliamentarians *per se* through role typologies. This project contributes by exploring how MEPs handle their multiple roles on a daily basis, by exploring activities and the spaces in which MEPs' nexus of roles is performed (Wenger:1998:158).

'Roles' are seen as 'an expressed attitude, a predisposition to behave in certain ways' (Davidson in Taggart&Bale:2006:9). Role typologies are a Legislative Studies tradition used to understand institutions and their inhabitants (Fenno:1991, Searing:1994). Taggart and Bale's (2006) interview-based research explores MEPs' backgrounds and constructs a five category typology: policy advocate, constituency representative, European evangelist, institutionalist, and absentee. They found first-time MEPs are highly educated and often have some national experience. They intend to use this background data to explore causes of roles taken on, whether they change, and links with behaviour.

The nature of the EP means the representative role is particularly challenging. Scully and Farrell (2003) note that, despite the democratic deficit, little attention has been paid to MEPs' attitudes to the practice of representation. They use multivariate analysis to assess whether individual, institutional, or political factors explain role variance. MEPs interpret their representative role broadly and see themselves as agents with multiple principals but

in task prioritisation, legislating rates highly and representing citizens of less importance (2003:272). All three systematic factors only partially explained attitude variance, so they conclude variance may be due to individual differences not captured. They suggest individuals' understanding of their role plays an important part in explaining differences in task prioritisation, and that there is more we can and should know about MEPs as 'individual elected representatives' (2003:271).

1.3.3 Socialisation and Going Native

Socialisation and the assumption actors 'go native' in Brussels is a rich research area in European Studies (Beyers:2010, Checkel:2005,2003). Recent empirical work does not support the socialisation of MEPs as it has been hypothesised. This project approaches socialisation inductively, finding MEPs learn to strategize successfully in this field through participation, which enhances our understanding of the practice of politics and reflects Scully's idea that MEPs are socialised as part of a learning process that facilitates goal achievement (2005:86).

This research strand goes back to Deutsch and Haas who saw micro-level socialisation leading to macro-level integration and the institutions as laboratories promoting their image (Shore:2000, Favell&Guiraudon:2011:4-6). The going native thesis says MEPs adopt the institution's core values, principally a more 'European' outlook (Scully:1999:1). Socialisation has long been a supposition but is seriously under-theorised and under-researched (Scully:2005:5). Recent studies have found MEPs' experience of 'Europe' has been misconceived, they do not shift their loyalty to Europe, and highlight self-selection (Bailer&Schneider:2000, Scarrow&Franklin:1999). Socialisation would theoretically lead to a correlation between service length and factors such as European identity, favouring integration, and enhancing the EP's role. Scully (2005) found little empirical support for going native. On top of no grounded theoretical framework, his analysis found a consistent lack of correlations and no substantial difference between MEPs' and MPs' attitudes to European issues. He suggests MEPs get a lower dose of 'Europe' than has been assumed because they retain contact with their domestic political scene and are not 'empty vessels' (2005:86).

Bailer and Schneider (2000) suggest the EP's traditional pro-integrationist stance is instead due to the transnational incentive structure. They investigated MEPs' attitudes to enlargement before and after plenary, finding nationality predicted committee votes but plenary revealed a united pro-integrationist EP. To influence the other EU institutions through shaming, the EP must be united. The groups ensure unity because they assign offices and reputation is important here, and MEPs choose between internal and external (re-election) politics.

Research on socialisation is inconclusive but Scully (2005:12) and Bailer and Schneider (2000:24) discourage discarding the going native thesis and highlight methodological issues, such as inadequate research designs. I argue that we need to rethink our approach to socialisation, away from going native because it is a more complex phenomenon than can be reduced to crude variables, and towards an approach which sees socialisation as individuals becoming participants and operating successfully in a local context¹¹ (Lave&Wenger:1991, see Chapter 3). To enhance our understanding of MEP behaviour, we must further explore the 'dose' of Europe MEPs receive by observing what their time in Brussels consists of, because what happens to actors in Brussels may have other implications than what studies have used as dependent variables (Beyers:2010:910). Scholarship has not investigated how and why socialisation should occur (Scully:2005:vi) and there are important questions here beyond 'Europeanisation' (Taggart&Bale:2006, Franklin&Scarrow:1999, Johansson:1998). Anthropology can help to broaden our approach to this phenomenon.

1.3.4 Internal Structures: groups, committees, and offices

Other scholars have gone beyond plenary to investigate the EP's internal structures. McElroy says the sheer amount of parliamentary time spent discussing internal organisation is noteworthy (2006:183) and thus it surely warrants investigation. Scholars have revealed important insights about processes occurring inside some of the EP's internal structures, but as discussed, a more holistic approach has remained elusive.

¹¹ Beyers (2005) found that exposure to the European level does not necessarily lead to supranational role playing and that domestic conditions affect Council officials' role adoptions, and Lewis (2005) identified a socialisation process based on a logic of appropriateness in the Council rather than the subsuming of national identities.

Firstly, scholars have examined European parties¹². The formation and organisational development of the EP groups is ‘a unique and significant innovation’ (Delwit et al:2004b:7). The recognition of ideological divisions occurred in 1953 with the suggestion committee nominations should represent member-states and political traditions, after which there was a *de facto* division into three groupings until 1979. A 1953 Rules Committee report emphasised the crucial role of political parties in EP internal organisation and the recognition of the groups by Rule 33 made them a factual and legal reality and they were given finance, secretariats, and offices (Hix et al:2003a). Whilst the number of groups has increased to the current seven (Appendix 2), the party system has institutionalised (Raunio:2006:253). The groups are central to the EP’s organisation and daily functioning. They set the agenda, compete for goods (e.g. offices, reports, and speaking time), and co-ordinate votes (McElroy:2006, Hix et al:2003b). There has been some work on their historical development and also the role of parties in the EU (Hanley:2007, Hix&Lord:1997, Delwit et al:2004, Bell&Lord:1998, Lindberg et al:2009) and autobiographies are emerging (Watson:2010, Plumb et al:2000). Much academic ink has been spilt defining the EP group structures, debating whether they fit the policy-seeking model, and discussing the NPDs’ role in their development (Bardi:2005, Lord:1998, Lightfoot:2006, Dietz:2000). Definitional and methodological debates have thus hampered further empirical investigations (Bardi:2004:309) and our understanding of the groups as “organisations” is limited. This project explores the role of the group in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics from the local perspective.

Other internal structures have attracted thriving research communities. The co-decision procedure - the primary procedure through which EU legislation is now created and puts the EP on an equal footing with the Council - has brought attention to the EP’s 20 permanent committees (Appendix 2b). They are said to be the ‘legislative backbone’ of the EP (Neuhold:2007, Burns:2006) where a substantial amount of the EP’s legislative work and real deliberation are done because ‘the EP in committee is the EP at work’ (McElroy:2006:180). The groups, committees, and NPDs are central structures in the internal organisation of the EP and crucial in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics. Corbett et al (2011), Judge and Earnshaw (2008), and Hix and Hoyland (2011) provide extensive

¹² There are ‘three faces’ to europarties; national parties are equivalent to Katz and Mair’s ‘party on the ground’, extra-parliamentary organisations to the ‘party in central office’, and the EP groups to the party in ‘public office’ (Bardi:2004:312).

information about these structures, their roles, and historical development. Whitaker (2011) and Ringe (2010) also provide helpful accounts of how these structures interact.

Since 1979, MEPs have been directly elected every five years. They are elected to represent their constituency and lists are drawn up by national parties. Once in the EP, MEPs join (currently one of seven) transnational party groups or remain non-aligned (NI) (Appendix 2). The groups are therefore made up of (currently over 150) national party delegations (NPDs). The current three largest groups are the EPP (European People's Party), S&D (Socialists & Democrats), and ALDE (the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe). These groups are led by group Presidents and Vice Presidents and each group has a proportionately sized secretariat to assist them. Each NPD within the group has a leader and they constitute a link between the group and national parties. MEPs are also members of the EP's twenty permanent committees. They are assigned to committees by their groups and the committees' composition broadly reflects plenary. The groups assign co-ordinators to each of the committees to co-ordinate their members and their activities within each legislative area. Each committee has a chair and four vice chairs and a rapporteur from the committee is assigned to each piece of legislation the committee deals with (see Ringe:2010:13-23).

Qualitative work on the EP's committees has produced valuable findings. Neuhold (2001, 2007) found committee votes are often highly consensual and suggests committees have different working cultures and a socialising effect on members who become part of a 'team'. Ripoll Servent (2013, 2012, 2011) found committee behaviour has 'matured' with empowerment. Bowler and Farrell's (1995) foregrounding paper on committee behaviour identified specialisation with empowerment and an accompanying trend for a greater role of the groups in co-ordinating behaviour. Building on this, McElroy (2006a, 2001) showed how the groups reward loyal MEPs by promoting them in the committee system and Whitaker (2001) investigated interaction between groups and committees by focusing on working groups and co-ordinators. Whitaker (2011) has examined how national parties and MEPs use the committee system to further policy goals, finding national parties, via delegation to NPD leaders, are key players. Mamadouh and Raunio (2003) also argue NPD's are often gatekeepers of spoils in the groups and maintain control over committee positions and rapporteurships, thus controlling MEP behaviour in this realm (also see Kreppel:2002). They find that some MEPs, particularly rapporteurs, constitute an

important source of information and may have ‘high influence’ on other MEPs’ decisions, and that ‘legislative participation is not equal’ because a subset of MEPs more often receive influential positions.

Academic interest in *relais* actors, (particularly rapporteurs, shadows, and co-ordinators) is also growing (Farrell&Héritier:2004, Judge&Earnshaw:2011, Høyland:2006, Rasmussen, A:2005,2008a, Whitaker:2001, Costello&Thomson:2011, Yoshinaka et al:2010). To each piece of legislation (report) introduced by the Commission, the EP appoints an MEP from the responsible committee as the rapporteur. Their job is to (1) incorporate the EP’s amendments into the draft proposal; (2) steer the report through the legislative process and speak on its behalf; and (3) to negotiate compromise within the EP between the groups and also to take part in negotiations with the Commission and Council on the EP’s behalf (Ringe:2010:15). Rapporteurs are allocated according to a points and bidding system based on the size of the groups, and negotiations between the groups occur among the co-ordinators. The remaining groups then often each allocate a shadow rapporteur to the report, particularly larger and more contested reports. Shadow rapporteurs were formally recognised in 2009. This system spreads the burden of speaking and negotiating on highly technical reports within the groups. Rapporteurs and shadows attend a number of meetings together and shadows may attend meetings with the Commission and Council (see Corbett et al:2011:157-161). Meanwhile co-ordinators are assigned within the groups for each committee. They speak on behalf of their committee in their group, and are also the main spokesperson for their group in the committee. Whitaker (2001) found the co-ordinators are viewed as influential in the committees but that their degree of influence depends on their personalities. Co-ordinators distribute tasks and reports among the MEPs from their group in their committee, meet regularly with the group presidency and with the co-ordinators from the other groups. Ringe says they crucially work to achieve coherent positions in the committee among their group members, but also work with the other co-ordinators to set the committee’s agenda, discuss votes, and distribute rapporteurships (2010:21). The role evolved in parliamentary practice but was officially recognised in 2009 (Corbett et al:2011:151). Academic research has tended to focus on the distribution and attainment of these positions and assumed their influence rather than exploring how this might be exerted in practice. Finally there is also growing interest in the role of lobbyists as providers of information to MEPs (Rasmussen:2013, Marshall:2010).

1.3.5 Shortcomings and Gaps

This second generation goes beyond plenary and begins to open up the black-box to explore processes occurring in internal structures and a range of important issues. This project contributes to the debates reviewed. It explores the role of the NPD in MEPs' decision-making process; MEPs' performance of multiple roles; socialisation as learning to play the political game; and particularly the role of the group in MEPs' everyday practice of politics. As the structure of this section suggests, the work on MEP behaviour is fragmented. The literature is missing a joined up approach to the practice of politics by MEPs inside this institution, from their perspective.

Coman (2009) reassesses the tripartite relationship between MEPs, groups, and NPDs with a principal-agent framework. He argues the literature does not fully fathom the mechanisms through which the relationships between them work and how the principals exercise influence. He investigates group-NPD conflicts to develop a theory of cohesion based on norms¹³ and external incentives, couched in a supply and demand framework. He argues cohesion is based on intrinsic unity from ideological homogeneity and learned norms (supply-side) and is achieved instrumentally from leadership and institutional levers (demand-side). He found the NPD is the more powerful principal, but that the capacity for both to convince agents is influenced by their characteristics, and therefore further qualitative research into mechanisms and relationships is required (2009:1112). Likewise Yordanova (2011) argues the EP is an institution in need of a theory and also finds we are missing an 'elaborate theory' of the links between these actors despite this being 'indispensible' in explaining the rising influence of the groups. We need to further understand how group lines are constructed and the role of the committees in group cohesion (2011:608). I argue that Ringe (2010) has gone a long way in beginning to address this deficit.

¹³ Bowler and Farrell (1999) found the EP has 'courtesy' but not 'parliamentary party loyalty' norms and suggest that, because norms require repetition and communication, languages and high turnover may mean the EP is not a conducive environment for norms to establish.

1.4 Deciding How To Vote: information transfer between experts and non-experts

‘Politics in the EP revolves around information, informational limitations, and expertise as the critical variables linking the preferences of individual legislators to their policy choices’
(Ringe:2010:23).

This section reviews Ringe’s (2010) study into how MEPs decide how to vote because this thesis builds upon his findings (see also Postu:2012 and Whitaker:2011 Chapter 7). Ringe’s micro-level analysis provides new insights into EP politics and an alternative explanation for cohesion levels, through his Perceived Preference Coherence (PPC) mechanism. Ringe focuses on uncertainty, expertise, and information asymmetry and examines how MEPs, groups, NPDs, and committees interact. His individual-level approach takes MEPs’ limitations seriously, approaches decision-making as a process, and sees group lines as endogenous products. My fieldwork observations reflected Ringe’s PPC mechanism as the process by which individual MEPs ‘normally’ decide how to vote (2010:209). However this project uses ethnography to explore how this mechanism works at the everyday level, as part of the wider practice of politics by MEPs in this political field.

Ringe urges that the normality indicated by previous research should be our starting point rather than our conclusion. The focus on outcomes and ‘broad-brush’ approach has missed important elements of EP politics, meaning this basic insight must be ‘fine-tuned’ (2010:1-5). Ringe investigates how individual MEPs decide how to vote on the increasing volumes of EU legislation (2010:26). He conceptualises politics as ‘a dynamic process based on the interplay of institutions and individuals’ (2010:3). The micro-level approach enables him to challenge the assumption that disciplinary action accounts for group cohesion. He dismisses this as intuitively appealing and parsimoniously attractive but problematic theoretically and empirically, largely due to the groups’ structural weaknesses discussed and that disciplining deviating MEPs is empirically ‘unheard of’ (2010:4,27,56). Legislative Studies offers an alternative explanation in the shared preferences of legislators. However Ringe doubts MEPs’ ability to define their own, let alone group colleagues’ preferences, on all the technical legislation MEPs vote on because this would incur high costs: ‘simply put, MEPs do not know enough about most legislative proposals to develop well-defined policy preferences’ (2010:51). He shows that policy preferences are not fixed exogenous inputs, but are formed endogenously during the deliberation process. Ringe’s answer to the cohesion puzzle:

‘undermines the notions that either party discipline or legislators’ shared policy preferences can account for party cohesion in the EP, and highlights a dynamic decision-making process based on the exchange of political and policy information between legislative experts and non-experts’ (2010:3).

MEPs suffer from information deficit and lack of time and resources to define preferences on all the technical legislation they vote on each plenary. When MEPs make decisions outside of their expert area, they adopt the position of expert EP colleagues. Expertise is grounded in the committees which are informational rather than distributional devices (2010:36). However, because they are concerned with policy consequences, MEPs follow their expert colleagues whose policy preferences they ‘believe’ most closely match their own - their expert group colleagues. ‘Perception’ is a crucial part of this; the group label acts as an efficient and reliable decision-making shortcut or proxy for shared outcome preferences which reduces the cost of information-gathering (2010:44).

Outcome preferences are ideologically based because contestation is along the socio-economic divide. However, the EP is not completely de-territorialised¹⁴. Therefore the greatest degree of PPC is among NPD colleagues who share ideological and constituency based preferences. However this only accounts for NPD cohesion. Ringe hypothesises that a group’s committee experts assume a common position most of the time because (1) they have to co-ordinate and compromise in committee to see their preferences approximated and (2) it is easier to co-ordinate this small group than group plenary (2010:6). If the committee experts present a common position it is more likely to be adopted by the group and therefore ‘it is party cohesion in committee that leads to party cohesion in plenary’ (2010:41). Committee members’ positions constitute ‘potent predictors’ of group voting and Ringe shows that non-experts follow their committee experts (2010:11,64-75). MEPs primarily follow their NPD committee colleague but do not have one 50% of the time, and then follow their group colleagues (2010:65). Committee members are thus ‘architects’ of group lines (2010:63-4). Ringe finds little need for active disciplining of members because non-experts follow their ‘trusted colleagues’ (2010:54). Party lines are created as the result of informational structures inside the groups which resemble a series of filters, and of deliberation among committee members to build a party line which is broadly acceptable to all NPDs (2010:58,78).

¹⁴ Constituency is reasonably conceived as nationality as most nations have a single electoral district, and links with regions are poorly developed (Ringe:2010:38).

Ringe questions whether non-experts 'blindly' follow expert colleagues, as so far the model has left out contestation and negotiation (2010:89). He differentiates between 'indifferent' and 'invested' MEPs (2010:91-94). Indifferent MEPs do not question how a proposal relates to their preferences. Invested MEPs care enough to seek reassurance that their preferences have been accounted for (2010:62). Experts supply information in the form of 'focal points'; simplified messages about expected implications of legislation. Focal points link normative preferences to legislative minutiae and are shorthand communication devices which shift attention to particular aspects; they are what the legislation is or becomes 'all about' (2010:109). They can be deployed strategically by committee experts as instruments of persuasion to convince non-experts and shape the deliberation process and outcomes¹⁵ (Ringe:2005, 2010:110).

This account of MEP behaviour does not make assumptions about the powers actors ought to possess but takes the limitations they face seriously (2010:44). Group lines are not imposed by leaderships but are the endogenous products of deliberation and co-operation among group committee members (2010:7). This expert common position is then adopted by non-experts through PPC, which subsequently leads to cohesion. This is the EP's 'normal' decision-making procedure. The mechanism joins up MEPs, NPDs, groups, and committees. The dynamic enables non-experts to make relatively informed decisions across a wide range of technical policy fields and means policy-making is based on 'genuine expertise' (2010:42) – a notion problematised in this thesis. In this dynamic model, the role of the group differs from that of national parties. Rather than top down 'enforcers' they act as 'umbrellas' and 'co-ordination rather than coercion, ensures party unity' (2010:8-10). Thus groups are cohesive due to constraints rather than capabilities (2010:46). The model shows how MEPs make decisions under conditions of substantive uncertainty and information asymmetry while maintaining democratic accountability. Identifying this dynamic was only made possible by examining decision-making from the perspective of an individual MEP and by not treating NPDs and groups as unitary actors (2010:1-25,78). The mixed methodology and individual level analysis explores sanctions and rewards; shared and contradictory preferences; constraining and facilitating institutions; and deliberation, contestation, persuasion, and manipulation - 'it is, in other words, about politics' (2010:12).

¹⁵ Focal points fall into 3 categories; the sovereignty-integration dimension, left-right divide, and constituency interests (2010:96-8). It is possible to identify the focal points provided by committee experts and use these to predict which contestation dimension structures voting patterns (2010:190-3). Six case-studies show how and which focal points shaped EP debates and outcomes (2010:11,89-191).

This thesis further explores the roles Ringe attributes to the committee and group structures in individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics. The PPC dynamic is woven through my empirical chapters. I build on Ringe's findings by exploring how this dynamic occurs at the everyday level as part of individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics here. I explore the activities through which this dynamic occurs. Whilst I concur with Ringe's analysis which begins to build theory without neglecting the real world of politics (2010:3), I argue that research is required which gets closer to the actors 'doing' European politics in their social context (Wodak:2009). Research is needed that further explores the meanings generated around these transnational structures and the dynamic interactions occurring between them and actors. This requires an epistemic shift to interpretivism and a methodological approach which explores actors' behaviour in context, and which takes their perspective seriously. Ethnography is the best approach to meet this challenge.

1.5 Getting Closer to European Actors

Two research strands take the epistemological approach required and have got closer to European actors and found out more about how they navigate and negotiate transnational structures and opportunities as active, dynamic agents. Learning from these strands can help us gain a deeper, more nuanced and holistic understanding of MEP behaviour in this political field, by exploring actors' behaviour and perspective in context. The first of these strands is the Anthropology of the EU, from a discipline whose core tenants are actor-centred and context-sensitive analysis (see Mitchell:2010). This literature is reviewed in Chapter 2 which outlines my ethnographic approach. Secondly there is a trend (re)emerging in European Studies for sociological research, indicated by the recent publication of Favell and Guiraudon's (2011) landmark volume (also Kauppi:2013). Sociologists are beginning to 'uncover the parts that actors...play in the theatre of European integration' and this work is part of a new European Studies generation which is investigating actors and informality empirically and more qualitatively rather than through modelling alone (Jenson&Mérand:2010:85-6). A growing community is undertaking Bourdieusian-style analyses conceptualising the institutions as transnational fields and the EU as a superfield (Kauppi:2011:154). This approach could perhaps helpfully be thought of as a third research generation.

Having been ‘curiously absent’, there is now a growing sociology of the EU as mainstream studies seek new inspiration (Favell&Guiraudon:2011:1). Medrano suggests sociologists have neglected the EU because they have not seen a ‘society’ there (in Jenson&Mérand:2010:80) – a view fieldwork in Brussels quickly challenges. As Adler-Nissen observes, ‘the European integration process is largely a socially driven process. To understand it, one must therefore explore its social character’ (2009:15,22). Jenson and Mérand argue the EU literature is under-socialised and that ‘EU studies are dominated by a narrow form of institutionalism. The focus on formal organizations and asocial norms begs for a more sociological approach that would encompass the informal practices, symbolic representations and power relations of social actors involved in European society’ (2010:74). They recommend a return to the sociological roots of neo-institutionalism and whilst not wanting to reject analysis of formal structures¹⁶, they suggest research has been ‘too distant from the actors *making Europe* and the conflicts among them as well as the social representations that organize their actions’ (2010:74-6). A sociological approach means seriously exploring the practices of actors in particular spaces (2010:85, Mérand:2011:188). Georgakakis urges research on the construction of the EU institutions as social space to understand processes and milieus¹⁷. This enables exploration of resources, positions of agents, professional trajectories, and consequently the building of a new picture of the way the institutions are set up and work. Institutions are not seen as an organigram or list of rules but ‘as a space of people ordered by the unequal distribution of their capital’ (2011,2010). This broadens the scope of analysis beyond the usual variables.

Although a systematic mapping of the EU field is yet to be implemented, a growing number of case-studies exist (see Georgakakis:2011:331). Kauppi (2011) explores MEPs’ profiles, resources, and uneven professionalization. He finds the limited political value of the EP has enabled dominated groups and novices to build their political careers and legitimize side-lined issues. Particular resources and characteristics are necessary to reach the top of the EU field and Kauppi highlights the development of (European) professionalization and endogenous specialisation among MEPs. However he found that individuals often still behave in manners characteristic of their national political cultures.

¹⁶ They differentiate sociology from institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, and constructivism –the latter which reduces a ‘sociological’ approach to norms and identity issues and attributes an autonomous, causal role to norms, whilst sociology sees actors’ strategies as socially embedded (2010:77, Checkel:2001,2007).

¹⁷ See Georgakakis:2011,2010,2009,2002, Georgakakis&Weisben:2010, Favell:2006, Kauppi:2003,2005, and Guiraudon:2000. The ‘field’ approach has been highlighted by Stone Sweet et al:2001, Haas:2004, Pouliot:2007,2008, and Fligstein:2008.

Meanwhile, Beauvallet and Michon (2010) use MEPs' biographies to analyse professionalization and socialisation and also underline the emergence of specialists who dominate the parliamentary space. They find the emergence of a parliamentary elite occupying the EP's leadership positions with specific European resources and career types. They find MEPs often have less legitimate resources than national politicians and that the EP represents an opportunity for political professionalization. These accounts make clear that 'the EU does not do anything by itself; it is people as everyday political agents who make the EU happen' (Kauppi:2011:150). This study has drawn on this research strand, particularly to develop the theoretical framework, and explores resources and strategies and analyses this transnational field to help present a deeper understanding of MEP behaviour.

Favell and Guiraudon's empirical sociology of the EU brings a fresh approach and re-thinks the object of study. This leads to a different interpretation of politics and locates the determination of institutions 'in the social positions and trajectories of actors and their symbolic conflicts about meaning, legitimacy, and social power' (2011:1-4). Political sociology sees the EU as 'a field over and beyond formal politics and law itself, that requires us to study the very people – the actors – that are building Europe ... As people, with a human face, they surely have much to tell us about EU political dynamics' (2011:19). These studies approach integration from the bottom up at the level of everyday political life (Kauppi:2003:776) and focus on the formation of a distinct European field of action and power struggles (Favell&Guiraudon:2011:18-23). The object is thus not the institutions per se 'but rather the individuals as part of collectivities and social groups who make up the EU and the integration between agents and, more broadly, the local worlds in which they live' (Kauppi:2011:154). This strand therefore shares many of the concerns of Anthropologists working on EU institutions by taking this actor-centred and more context-sensitive approach. These strands have contributed to the development of this project.

1.6 Contribution: understanding the everyday practice of EP politics

This chapter has critically reviewed the literature on MEP behaviour and positioned this study in the research field. It has identified gaps to which this project responds, debates to which it contributes, and strands to which it speaks. A first research generation, which analysed MEPs' plenary voting behaviour, characterises the EP as a normal parliament with cohesive groups and acknowledges the role NPDs play in co-ordinating voting behaviour.

My key criticisms are that it takes a narrow approach to political behaviour; that its focus on explaining outcomes has been to the detriment of understanding processes; that it does not investigate how group cohesion is achieved; and does not explore the role of these structures from the local perspective.

A wider body of work, or second generation, takes a broader approach to MEP behaviour and has explored a range of important issues including the role of nationality and national parties, roles, socialisation, and internal structures. I have outlined how this project contributes to each of these debates. My key criticism of this fragmented body of work is that it lacks a joined up approach to MEP behaviour and misses an elaborate theory of how MEPs, groups, NPDs, and the committees interact. However Ringe's work (2010) goes a long way towards addressing this deficit by investigating how individual MEPs decide how to vote and identifying the PPC mechanism. I build on Ringe's findings and through ethnography, explore how the transfer of information between experts and non-experts he describes occurs at the everyday level as part of MEPs' everyday practice of politics.

What remains missing from the literature is research which gets closer to MEPs as actors doing politics as a social activity. An epistemic shift to interpretivism is required and an ethnographic approach which takes an actor-centred approach and explores behaviour in context from the local perspective. This approach enables us to further explore the role of the group and actors' dynamic interactions with these structures. As discussed, there is a (re)emerging trend for a more sociological approach to the EU which conceptualises the institutions as transnational fields. This strand has much in common with the Anthropology of the EU and provides added value by studying the people building Europe and helping us to understand the local worlds in which they do European politics.

This study aims to provide a more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics, by taking a more actor-centred and context-sensitive approach. In doing so it explores the role of the group from the local perspective as well as how individual MEPs make decisions, perform multiple roles, and the opportunities and constraints they face. To clarify, this study makes a number of specific contributions to the literature. Firstly, it takes a broader approach to MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of 'politics as usual' by individuals (Wodak:2009). Secondly it goes backstage to take a deeper look at pre-plenary processes. Thirdly, it explores local meanings generated around the

NPD and group structures. Fourthly it builds on Ringe's (2010) work to further elaborate how his PPC dynamic occurs as part of MEPs' everyday practice of politics. Finally, the thesis gets closer to MEPs as actors doing politics to de-mystify and explore what this profession consists of.

In order to gather the detailed data required to address the research question, this project has been conducted with the ethnographic approach outlined next in Chapter 2. The data collected was then analysed with the iteratively constructed inter-disciplinary framework outlined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2:

Methodology: “In the thick of it”: an ethnographic approach

‘Unless we believe that agents have no bearing on political outcomes, we must employ tools that uncover, rather than presuppose, individuals’ motivations and behaviours. By examining how actors themselves view the myriad political situations in which they are involved, we bring to the fore their influence on political outcomes, constrained as it is by structural factors’
(Bayard de Volo & Schatz:2004:268).

‘Sometimes it takes an anthropologist to reveal the practices that are so taken-for-granted that no one in the institution regards them as worth commenting on, even though – to an outsider – they are very important’
(Bale in Mundell:14/10/2010).

2.1 Introduction

Through ethnography this thesis explores the everyday practice of politics by MEPs inside the EP with an agent-focused and context-sensitive approach. The research has been conducted with an ethnographic methodology which is ‘fit for purpose’ to collect the detailed data required to explore the research question and issues (Spencer et al:2003). An ethnographic approach enabled me to go backstage and observe daily activities and routines; explore actors’ views, perspective, and dynamic interactions with structures; and the local meanings generated around structures. It thus enabled me to explore the everyday practice of politics by individual actors within this political field and what this profession consists of – by getting closer to the actors doing European politics in their own context. This chapter firstly introduces ethnography and what it has told us about the EU and other political institutions. It then outlines the research design before reflecting on the key methodological issues which position this partial account (Clifford:1986). It concludes by clarifying how the research question and issues have been addressed.

2.2 Ethnography

‘The very ordinariness of normality often prevents us from seeing it’ (Ybema et al:2009:1).

2.2.1 What is Ethnography?

Ethnography is part of the cross-cutting qualitative tradition which has recently seen a resurgence in the social sciences (Ybema et al:2009:3). Qualitative research enhances our understanding of social processes by studying contextual factors and seeking to understand

actors on their own terms (Eriksen:2001:36). It is characterised by an inductive approach, unstructured context-sensitive methods, how questions, rich data, and explanations at the level of meaning (Spencer et al:2003:3) - thus offering an alternative to (positivistic) reductionism (Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:17). Multiple methods are often used and the researcher can be seen as a bricoleur; a jack-of-all-trades who uses whatever tools are at hand, understanding that research is an interactive process shaped by themselves, the setting, and participants at that moment. The emergent bricolage stresses meaningful relationships operating in the research context (Denzin&Lincoln:1998:1-5).

Ethnography itself is 'the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others' (Van Maanen:1988 in Emerson et al:1995:10). It draws on a family of methods so that rich accounts are produced which 'respect the irreducibility of human experience' (O'Reilly:2009:3). I understand ethnography to have three important characteristics (see Wedeen:2010, Mitchell:2010). Firstly it is often equated with the method participant observation, widely viewed as the 'hallmark' of Anthropology (Stocking:1983:70). Ethnographers seek the natives' perspective of their world through a period of fieldwork where they live among their informants gaining direct and sustained contact with the group. The resulting ethnographic text lies closely to the world as experienced and described by them (Eriksen:2001:36, O'Reilly:2009:122). Secondly ethnography is committed to methodological holism; 'accepting that in principle anything in the research context can be relevant and could potentially be taken into account', so ethnographers adopt a curious cross-eyed vision where one eye is tightly focused on a topic while the other ceaselessly roves around the context because there is never nothing going on (Gellner&Hirsch:2001:7, Wedeen:2010). Thirdly, some scholars describe ethnography as a sensibility or lens through which to view the world and an orientation to exploring it (Ybema et al:2009:15, Yanow:2009). It means allowing the field-site and participants to reveal what is important and this should be the ethnographer's first commitment (Schatz:2009:3, Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:181). This is achieved by documenting 'how the people see and talk about their everyday social activities and groupings, and the wider worlds they live in. It is their normal scenes of activity, topics of conversation and standards of evaluation that are the objects of ethnographic fieldwork' (Sanjek:2002:196).

Ethnographic immersion thus grants the researcher access to the ‘subjacent’ realm: the everyday rules, practices and unarticulated notions, attitudes, and perceptions which go unquestioned, or the local knowledge which is common-sense and taken-for-granted because everybody knows it and which therefore has a real impact on the way politics is practised. Ethnographic immersion permits us to grasp this realm as it ‘compels us to look at the banalities of daily life as they are lived by the people from whom we are trying to learn’ and enables understanding of what encourages people to behave politically ‘in the myriad of ways that they do’ (Schatzberg:2008:1-5). This approach is valuable to those seeking to understanding behaviour in complex institutions like the EP - where decision-making is ‘subject to a multitude of interests and a myriad of rules’ (Noury:2002:34) – because it results in a depth of understanding which cannot be gained through variable analysis (Schatzberg:2008).

Whilst traditionally anthropologists immersed themselves in exotic societies, ethnographers are increasingly ‘studying up’ in the west and powerful organisations (Nader:1972, Wright:1994:14, also see Gledhill:1994). Organisational Ethnography aims to uncover and explicate the ways people understand their work settings and actions and manage their day-to-day work situation (Van Maanen in Rosen:1991:12). Life within organisations is goal-orientated and Organisational Ethnography is concerned with the social relations coalesced around these goal-oriented activities (Rosen:1991:3). Detailed ethnographic accounts of organisational life exist peppered across the social sciences, providing rich insights about their site and making theoretical contributions to their fields (Smith:1997:427). Organisational Ethnography also has its own history (Wright:1994, Schwartzman:1993, Jiminez:2007). Scholars have explored so many organisations that you can ‘name the organisation and some ethnographer has written about it’ (Levin:2003:9). Doing organisational ethnography means taking the principles described above into an organisational setting to explore processes there¹⁸. Organisational ethnographers experience many of the same research ‘moments’¹⁹ as traditional ethnographers but have also documented particular issues such as access and roles (Gellner&Hirsch:2001, Bell:1999). However problematic, it is this embeddedness which enables ethnography to gain its distinctive depth and added value (Fine et al:2007, Van Maanen:2001:235).

¹⁸ Ethnographers then cast understanding through thick description of symbolic language (stories, metaphors, myths, jargon, gossip, anecdotes); symbolic acts (rites, rituals, practices, games and routines); and symbolic objects (spaces, architecture, clothes, and artefacts) (Ybema et al:2009).

¹⁹ E.g. gaining access, building relationships, saturation, interpretation, and invoking examples (Van Maanen:2001:235).

Close and sustained observation of everyday activities reminds us that organisations are essentially places inhabited and embodied by individuals who work and it is within their quotidian experiences and exchanges that wider processes are hidden (Ybema et al:2009:1). 'Being there' enables deep exploration of processes, power relations, and interactions (Rhodes et al:2007, Van Maanen:2001). Organisational ethnographers, from whatever discipline they call home, 'share the desire to understand the dynamics of human groupings' (Fine et al:2007:26). Fieldwork draws attention to the importance of contextual factors in understanding organisational activity. It can help us understand the meanings actors attribute to structures and how they shape behaviour. An organisational perspective believes organisations can 'shape and reshape' actors' preferences, sense of belonging, and behaviour - but organisations must be unpacked and components analysed and theorised to clarify the conditions under which processes occur because the extent to which institutions might impinge upon actors 'has to depend on how these institutions are organized' (Egeberg:2002). European Studies has been enriched by insights from anthropologists doing ethnography in the EU institutions, some of which are discussed below (see Bellier&Wilson:2000).

2.2.2 The Anthropology of the EU

Anthropology has been visible in European Studies because of McDonald (2005), Abélès (2004, 2000), Bellier (2008, 2000), and Shore's (2000, 2001, 1997) work (Bourne&Cini: 2005:6). The Anthropology of the EU is a research field which engages with key anthropological concepts – e.g. practices, rituals, demos, community, and identity - to enhance understanding of European integration. Demossier (2011) argues the EU offers anthropologists 'a remarkable field' for the study of institutions, power, discourse, cultural politics, identity, and interaction between the global and local. In return, by constructing its objects as dynamic, contested, and fluid, and focusing on understanding the (EU) field as a local context - Anthropologists have shed light on cultures, power games, and questioned notions of legitimacy to analyse what constitutes 'winners' and 'losers' in this transnational society (2011:14).

There have been two key ethnographic studies of the EP which I build upon²⁰. Abélès (2004) was the first to conduct fieldwork inside the EU (1989-1992). He (1992, 1993)

²⁰ See also Postu:2012 and Belkacem:2013.

reveals insights into an institution where ‘at once, we have the impression of dealing with a closed world with its own codes and ways of doing things’ (1993:1). Abélès describes the labyrinthine architecture, office arrangements, bars, meetings, rhythms, and symbolic aspects which affect everyday operations. He observes MEPs’ constant movement and the ‘mental gymnastics’ required to keep up here and suggests that; ‘discontinuous space, fragmented time, this is the exact opposite of the federal dream of integration and harmonization’ (1993:6). Most importantly here, Abélès explores the tension between MEPs’ dual parliamentary and representative function; the paradox at the heart of the system. He says Anthropologists should investigate this double nature of political activity which reveals tensions at the heart of the European project. Effects are produced by the permanent discrepancy between legislative expertise and performing a representative role (1993:11-18). The EP appears de-territorialised and contradictory to rooted-ness in national representation; an MEP said ‘my sphere of activity is Europe; my constituency is France’ (1993:7). He also describes patterns of activity such as MEPs briefly greeting political colleagues but preferring compatriots for a drink (1993:16-17). Ethnography enables him to ask: what is the place of politics and how is it practised?

Secondly, Wodak (2009:58) has more recently explored MEPs’ practice of politics here since enlargement has vastly multiplied cultural complexity. What interested Abélès was ‘not the organisation of time but its disorganization ... movement is so constant that one sometimes loses sight of the purpose behind’ it (1993:4). Wodak explores backstage ‘politics as usual’ and order in the disorder. She finds politicians’ everyday lives are as messy and unpredictable as organised. MEPs acquire strategies to pursue their agendas within this busy institutional context, but their success depends on their position in the field and knowledge management because ‘much of what we perceive as disorder depends on inclusion in shared knowledge or exclusion’ (2009:14-16). MEPs require ‘organisational’, ‘expert’, and ‘political’ knowledge to practice politics successfully (2009:46, see Chapter 3). Most importantly, Wodak’s day of shadowing found that there is no simple job description and depending on how individual MEPs organise their priorities, there are multiple roles, motivations, agendas, visions, and identities operating - collectively and individually (2009:111). With reference to the dual function, Wodak describes how MEPs construct multiple identities as they move across different communities (2009:113-155). Ethnography can illuminate what the act of representation consists of and I continue to explore MEPs’

everyday strategies and ways in which they perform multiple roles (2009:71-5, see Horolets:2010).

Anthropologists have conducted research on other EU institutions. Abélès et al's (1993) research on the Commission demonstrates the dynamic nature of cultures in decision-making processes and explores the negotiating role of actors in the policy process. They explored the world of civil servants through their daily behaviour and perceptions about what they do. They investigated the existence (or not) of a Commission culture; weight of languages and national traditions and their impact on working relationships; and how a European identity might emerge.

Shore's (2000, 2001) more critical approach investigates cultural dimensions of the politics of integration. Examining whether culture is being used to counter legitimacy problems, he finds cultural initiatives similar to the strategies used by elites building nation-states. Most importantly here, Shore explores cultural attitudes of Commission staff, probing its organisational culture and what people actually do. Officials see themselves as architects 'building Europe' and French norms dominate. The working culture is 'riven with contradictions, stratagems and political horse-trading' and a messy informal sector operates beneath the image of order and formality (Shore:2000:207). As the marketplace shapes corporate cultures (Deal&Kennedy:1982), the Commission's peculiar role as a supranational civil service influences the character of the organisation and personnel (Shore:2000:5). Shore also explores *engrenage* processes (see also Abélès:2000, Rozanska:2011). The EU institutions 'occupy a social field that is firmly embedded in its specific local context' and the Brussels factor has led to Brusselsisation rather than Europeanisation: ghettoisation has led to a strong *esprit de corps*, enhanced because the uprooted seek new communities so officials live in a 'rarefied diplomatic habitat' (Shore:2000:164-171, also Bellier:2002, Favell:2001). This reminds us of the importance of social context in understanding EU actors' behaviour.

Other scholars have contributed to this field (Geuijen et al:2008, Holmes:2000, Ross:1995,2011, Zielonka:2007, Gingrich:2006, Grillo:2007) but four studies particularly contributed to this project. Bellier explores the politics of interest and conceptualises institutions as microcosms which 'incorporate their agents into a cultural form which specifies their position' (2000:60-2). Zabusky's (1995) ethnography of the European Space

Agency argues practising co-operation does not depend on homogenisation but on on-going negotiation and conflict, expressed in technical and political divisions of labour. Meanwhile Favell (2008) explores the hidden experiences and informal barriers ‘eurostars’ have faced moving between ‘eurocities’ because micro-level experiences provide reflections on macro-level frameworks. Latterly, Rozanska (2011) analyses Polish officials in Brussels as a consolidating community. She finds they are alienated from other Poles and the local population and elucidates the dynamics facilitating this enclosure as stereotyping, engrenage, and encapsulating networking (also see Favell:2001).

2.2.3 Ethnography in Political Science

Mundell (14/10/2010) discusses the use of ethnography in Brussels. He raises ethnographers’ tense relationship with some parts of the European Studies community and their challenge of demonstrating the validity - and contribution – of their work:

“I have often encountered hostility within the disciplines that dominate EU studies. Their accusation is that ethnography lacks rigour, is based on ‘hearsay’ and relies on unreliable ‘anecdotal evidence’. It is a charge that is easily rebutted. “Human beings are not rats in a laboratory. Ethnography aims to provide insight into issues of meaning and behaviour that cannot be grasped through conventional scientific approaches” (Shore in Mundell:14/10/2010).

Wedeen says the objectivist claims traditionally pressed by Political Science have made the use of ethnography somewhat fraught in the discipline²¹ (2010:255). However, whilst Political Science is probably not on the cusp of an ethnographic revolution (Hilmer:2011:98), there is evidence of growing interest in the added value it offers by providing insight into actors’ lived experiences and focusing on context, to enhance our analyses of power (Wedeen:2010:261). The texts Hilmer (2011) reviews plea for methodological pluralism and other evidence includes publication of new edited volumes (Schatz:2009, Joseph et al:2007), discussions in journals (Tilly:2006, Bayard de Volo & Schatz:2004), and workshops (Nepos.net). Schatz elaborates on ethnography’s potential contribution to Political Science, arguing it (1) produces detailed evidence to flesh out or question generalisations, (2) expands how we understand the political, (3) innovates, and (4)

²¹ Wedeen distinguishes between positivist and interpretivist ethnographies and contends that interpretivism does not have to forswear generalizations or explanations and that ethnography can help establish them (2010).

retains concern for normative issues (2009:9-11). The ethnographic approach taken in this project brings this added value to the literature on MEP behaviour, particularly fleshing out generalisations and expanding how we understand the political (see also Gledhill:1994).

The addition of ethnography to the disciplinary toolbox has meant the literature on some issues and institutions is richer and practices and motivations are better understood (see Schatz:2009). Some indicative contributions are reviewed here which particularly inspired this project (see also Ybema et al:2009, Schatzberg:2001). Ethnography has been conducted in other legislatures, perhaps most notably by Fenno and his 'soaking and poking' in the US Congress. Fenno (1973, 1978, 1991) identified three legislator goals and explores how Congressmen's relationship with their constituency and home-style affects their legislative behaviour. Weatherford (1985) explores how Congress' rituals, ceremonies, myths, customs, and clans affect law-making. Matthews (1960) immersed himself in the Senate's daily life and explores senators' common experiences, such as living in artificial hotel-lobby-like Washington whose 'character and way of life affects them profoundly' (1960:78). He describes the Senate's folkways; 'unwritten rules of the game, its norms of conduct, its approved manner of behaviour. Some things are just not done' (1960:92). Codes – such as adopting a national view, the apprenticeship period, specialisation, and reciprocity - affect the distribution of power. Meanwhile Searing (1994) constructed a role typology for Westminster to aid understanding of the impact of goals upon legislator behaviour. He also argues legislators are guided by political culture and 'the culture of parliaments constitutes a substantial portion of their political culture' (1994:x).

Crewe's ethnographic work on the House of Lords shows 'the indivisibility of relationships and rituals from politics there' (2005:x, 2010). She shows that power inheres in relationships between offices, positions, and groups and is expressed in symbolic and concrete forms. Potent symbols and conventions allow people to make sense of an otherwise chaotic world (2005:1-7). Meanwhile Faucher-King (2005) explored the peculiarity of British party conferences, a taken-for-granted feature of political life. She explores what they reveal about party 'group styles' and wider change processes in party politics. Interviews only reveal what parties are willing to say about themselves. To really understand how they function we need to look at practices (2005:7). She describes conference rituals and the season itself as ritualistic. Meanwhile the *Journal of Legislative Studies* has recently published a special issue on ritual, ceremony, and performance in

parliaments and suggests; ‘we need to understand not only institutional form, but also the way a particular form takes shape – through modes of behaviour, negotiating the political and physical space and creating an institution specific culture which socialises members in their participation’ (Rai:2010:281).

Ethnography has been conducted in other political locations (see Gledhill:1994, Eltringham:2010, Abram:2001, Edwards:1994, Durrenberger&Reichert:2010). Goffman (1961) and Blau (1963) published groundbreaking analyses of the ‘underlife’ of bureaucracies, revealing backstage irrationalities (Ybema et al:2009:3, Schwartzman:1993:45). Understanding bureaucracies ‘requires a knowledge of the patterns of social interaction within them’ (Blau:1963:v). It is not the fact the formal and informal differ which is significant, but that these activities and interactions form consistent patterns (1963:3). Rather than trying to grasp the entire *gestalt* of the ‘organisational village’, ethnographers increasingly orientate themselves towards a person, practice, object, or issue (Ybema et al:2009:5). For example Harper (1998) followed mundane documents through the IMF - reports to post-its - because interactions between people and documents tell us something about relationships and how the official view is constructed and alternatives are driven out. As Forsey says of studying western elites; ‘as with villagers on remote islands, we are observing ways in which people come to grips with their lives in the particular historical and social moments they find themselves’ (2004:69).

2.3 Research Design

2.3.1 Research Aims

This thesis explores the ways in which MEPs come to grips with their lives in this transnational context. As stated, it aims to get closer to MEPs as actors ‘doing’ politics. It takes an ethnographic approach in order to bring actors, agency, and social context into the study of MEP behaviour. The primary research question asks: how do individual MEPs practice European politics at the everyday level inside the EP? Through ethnography, this project takes an actor-centred, individual-level, context-sensitive, and holistic approach to MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics. It approaches politics as an activity performed on a daily basis by individuals within particular social spaces.

By approaching MEP behaviour in this way - as the everyday practice of politics 'as usual' (Wodak:2009) – the thesis is able to explore the role of the NPDs and groups more deeply and shed light on three inter-related research issues. It firstly explores how individual MEPs decide how to vote, by exploring routine knowledge management practices and the role of the NPD and group, as CoPs, in this process. I build on Ringe's (2010) PPC mechanism by exploring how the dynamic exchange of information he identifies occurs at the everyday level. I explore this process from an individual MEP's perspective and MEPs' dynamic interactions with these structures as part of their monthly routine. The thesis secondly explores how MEPs perform multiple roles in this social space. It explores how they negotiate the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands made of them by focusing on time management and the organisation of daily activities, thus building on Abélès (1993) and Wodak's (2009) work. Thirdly, the thesis explores the constraints and opportunities MEPs face in their everyday practice of politics. It explores the social context MEPs practice politics within and how an MEP can exert influence in this transnational political field and its habitus (Chapter 3). These explorations help us to understand how actors play the political game and thus begin to provide a more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour. The following research design demonstrates how ethnography is the most appropriate methodological approach for this endeavour.

2.3.2 Ethnographic Methodology

Methodological principles guide our choice of methods (Burnham et al:2004:4). Theoretical commitments shape our approach and the data we seek (Byrne:2004:184) and we must describe our process and approach fully because reflexivity implies reflection on what is at stake, 'including the orientation of the researcher towards the research' (Dunne et al:2005:21,164). Researchers must recognise their ontology to engage in ordered thinking about the social world (Marsh&Furlong:2002). This project's ontological and epistemological position is anti-foundationalist and interpretivist and its methodological approach is ethnography.

For anti-foundationalists, reality is socially constructed. Our epistemological and methodological positions logically follow our ontology (Grix:2004:61-3). Interpretivism starts from the anti-foundationalist premise that 'humans are part of a whole and they do not exist in a meaningful way outside that whole' (Aspinwall&Schneider:2000:14).

Interpretivist approaches to politics ‘focus on the meanings that shape actions and institutions, and the ways in which they do so’ (Bevir&Rhodes:2002:151). Interpretivists seek understanding of interactively produced realities, instead of predictive parsimonious explanation of independent reality. Interpretivism is an ‘umbrella term’ (Grix:2004:82). Hermeneutics relates to the interpretation of cultures and advocates understanding through ‘a merging of horizons with the producers of knowledge’ so that knowledge can be translated into academia, which is known as the double hermeneutic (Giddens:1984:402, see O’Reilly:2009:120-2, Eriksen:2001:36).

Interpretivists often do ethnography because they favour an explorative approach and aim to understand individual action and perspectives through daily interactions and common-sense ideas in the context of wider cultures²². In ethnographic research, the researcher becomes an instrument and knowledge is produced through a process of moving between parts and wholes, cultures and individuals, and understanding is gained through participation and experience (O’Reilly:2009:120-122). Ethnography is iterative and inductive; iterative meaning the research design and theoretical framework evolve as phenomena are encountered, and inductive meaning starting with few preconceptions and allowing ideas and theory to emerge from the field (O’Reilly:2009:104, Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:14). Ethnographic research results in an emergent bricolage which is ‘a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomena under analysis’ and connects parts to the whole and stresses meaningful relationships operating in the context (Denzin&Lincoln:1998:3-4).

2.3.3 Case Study

Case studies are a form of in-depth inquiry used to understand complex social phenomena whilst retaining the meaningful characteristics of real-life events by studying naturally occurring situations. They are often the preferred strategy for ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions and contemporary phenomena. Whilst qualitative case-studies, like ethnography, cannot be generalised, they generate theoretical propositions and elaborate processes as well as presenting descriptive narrative. Case studies cope with many variables through triangulation (Yin:2003:1-13, O’Reilly:2009:24). Ethnographers do not aim to make

²² Although ethnography lends itself to interpretivism, authors note its positivistic roots with Malinowski and contributions to other fields such as functionalism (O’Reilly:2009:119, Wedeen:2010, Bell:1999).

generalisable) claims about a group in a positivistic sense, but rather aim to illuminate wider processes occurring within a context (Cerwonka:2004:5,47); such as what the process of voting list construction in an EP group can reveal about cohesion.

As stated, ethnography connects parts to the whole to help us understand wider processes. Ethnographic fieldwork for this research was conducted with one of the EP's mainstream centre groups via an internship with a UK MEP, to explore the everyday practice of politics by MEPs inside this institution and the role of the group from the local perspective. The data from this 'part', and experiences of communities gained from this position, are triangulated with interview and survey data to present and illuminate processes occurring in this social context, rather than to make generalisable claims about the NPD, group, or EP. By conducting an in-depth case-study of one mainstream centre group's routines, this project explores the local meanings generated around these structures and their role in MEPs' everyday practice of politics (see Section 3.4).

2.3.4 Research Methods

Research methods and their assumptions shape the data they produce so they must fit our approach to ensure a design is consistent and coherent (Dunne et al:2005:27,162). This research takes the interpretive, ethnographic and therefore in-depth, exploratory, inductive, and iterative approach described. Its iterative nature is apparent in the research timetable (Appendix-A). It explores the everyday practice of politics by MEPs and following the anthropological tradition believes 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, [and takes] culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (Geertz:1973:5). Therefore the research seeks the local perspective which requires sustained, direct contact and methods which give access to participants' views and perspective. Therefore three methods (participant observation, interviews, and a survey) have been used to gather the detailed data required to address the research question. The data were triangulated to illuminate wider processes as 'the prudent social scientist, like the wise investor, must rely on diversification to magnify the strengths and to offset the weaknesses of any single instrument' (Putnam:1993:12).

2.3.4.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation was conducted openly via a seven month internship in the Brussels office of a UK MEP, June-December 2010²³. I went backstage and participated in ‘politics as usual’ and observed everyday activities and processes. Fieldwork enabled me to observe the ways in which MEPs practice politics. As Whyte said, ‘you can just hang around, and you’ll learn the answers in the long run without even having to ask the questions’ (1993:303). Ethnographers ‘listen, observe, participate, converse, lurk, collaborate, count, classify, learn, help, read, reflect and - with some luck – appreciate and understand what goes on (and maybe why) in the social worlds they have penetrated’ (Van Maanen:2001:240). I did these things and saw how MEPs’ time and activities are organised and how performances are prepared backstage and the everyday strategies employed to help them cope with this work context. I observed banal aspects of daily political life (such as diary and email management) because whilst we may find our daily routines embarrassingly uninteresting, they express the wider social and cultural order (Inglis:2005:3). Ethnography explores the ways groups are constituted by examining the means of communication which ‘act as shorthand for more complex concepts or systems’ and are so familiar members don’t notice them (Abram:2001:201). In this way I was able to understand the role of the group in MEPs’ practice of politics inside the EP.

Fieldwork access was negotiated between July-November 2009. Four avenues were pursued before the internship was agreed, although eventually I was able to choose between two internships offered. I chose the final position because of the varied and extensive experience of the MEP, good rapport, and his/her²⁴ interest in the project. I moved to Brussels in May 2010 and lived near the EP so spent seven months living deep inside the *Brussels Bubble*, experiencing life in the European Quarter and committed to methodological holism (see Chapter 4). I usually worked four days a week and had one to conduct and transcribe interviews and write memos. I worked alongside two assistants and ran the office alone in September during the gap between them.

²³ Preliminary fieldwork was conducted in 2009. I participated in Green Party Action Days to observe party processes and observed Brighton & Hove Council meetings to explore what these rituals revealed about local politics. I piloted an elite interview with a Green MEP to explore the role of the group and how objectives can be pursued in the EP. Interviewing her assistant indicated early the important role these actors play.

²⁴ From here the MEP is referred to as ‘he’ for reading ease although the gender is not disclosed.

My tasks routinely included responding to emails and calls, diary management, travel, organising events, writing articles and briefings, research, managing visitors, and other backstage preparations to ensure the MEP's day ran smoothly. I accompanied him to three Strasbourg sessions and observed the rituals and routines which constitute political life there. When he was absent I sometimes took notes for him. I regularly attended meetings and events which informed and enhanced my understanding of the practice of politics here. This included NPD, working group, group, assistant, committee, and committee *prep* meetings, and plenary sessions. I explored what an MEP's time consists of in Brussels and the role group and NPD structures play in helping them cope in this (work) context to pursue their aims. Being there meant I could discuss events with the MEP and take part in the informal side of institutional life. I regularly attended events, ate lunch in the canteen, sat in coffee bars, and socialised with assistants and officials. Thus I built up a picture of the routines which constitute the practice of EP politics.

I systemically kept detailed field-notes about my experiences and observations. Bogdan says there is never a day with nothing worth recording and notes should be descriptive, reflective, and include faux pas which inform understanding (1972:39). Field-notes do more than record observations: ethnographers' 'selections' convey their understandings so writing is an interpretive process, 'the first act of textualizing' (Emerson et al:1995:16). In the early days and weeks I wrote copious notes every evening about everything I saw, heard, and encountered, including notes about physical spaces, people, and activities - whilst the site was unfamiliar. I carried a camera and notepad to jot details²⁵. It is important to record 'early sensitivities' before they are 'blunted' by re-socialisation (Emerson et al:1995:13). As routines became familiar, I wrote more focused pieces about recurring themes and notable occurrences. These field-notes were complemented with four dispatches sent to my supervisors summarising my findings and methodological concerns, and a personal diary I wrote intermittently about the experience of fieldwork to help with reflexivity (O'Reilly:2009:75). Towards December I became saturated with regards to what I could learn from this 'position' although I had many questions about other aspects of institutional life and how my (somewhat chaotic) ideas fitted together. I focused then on conducting interviews to further explore my ideas.

²⁵ During informal interactions if I feared disrupting rapport I made jottings in private spaces (Emerson et al:1995:24).

2.3.4.2 Elite Interviews

I conducted 58 elite semi- and un-structured interviews with 18 MEPs²⁶, 14 assistants, 9 group staff, 14 officials (2 repeated), and 1 lobbyist (Appendix-B). These were carried out in four waves: 2 preliminary interviews in 2009 to develop the research outline; 6 June-July 2010 to discuss early sensitivities with key informants; 37 October-December 2010 selected with purposeful sampling²⁷ to discuss participant observation findings; and 13 June-July 2012 to fill gaps, further elucidate my concepts, and for participant validation (GSR Unit:2007:35, O'Reilly:2009:18). Interviewees were contacted by email and informed about the research. A citation was agreed individually with each. The interviews were recorded, except six where participants refused so notes were taken (4 officials and 2 assistants). All the MEP interviews were transcribed verbatim. Most interviews were conducted in offices or a cafe when offices were shared. As is wont to happen in iterative-inductive research, the questions evolved over the four waves as my ideas developed and as is typical in semi-structured interviews, the questions were open and tailored to each participant. Officials' interviews were particularly unstructured so I could explore their particular perspective. However the MEP interviews in wave 3 were semi-structured and explored the three research issues by asking questions to elucidate the role of the group, how multiple roles are negotiated, how MEPs pursue their aims, and how influence is exerted here. Every interviewee was asked a snowball question but interviews were also organised with and through fieldwork contacts (Matthews:1960:272).

Despite their frequent use in Political Science, there is little methodological reflection on interviewing beyond technique (Berry:2002, Richards:1996, Dexter:1970, Davies:2001, Leech:2002). It is important to reflect on the process and (nature of the) data this instrument produces (see Skinner:2012). Rapport can significantly affect the data you collect; participants 'can be engaged intellectually but give nothing personal, or be very open but not willing to critically reflect' (Maxwell:2005:83). I organised interviews more easily in waves 2 and 3 whilst I had an internal email address and rapport was built more easily as I could discuss common experiences (e.g. current events) and make 'life-links' (Puwar:1997).

²⁶ 6 MEPs declined and appointments could not be made with 6.

²⁷ Purposeful sampling seeks cases from which a lot can be learnt about central issues (Patton:2002:230).

Interviews tended to vary with types of participant. MEPs were happy to be cited but with some it required rapport work to get beyond the 'official' view as MEPs are used to being interviewed by journalists. Staff were often more reticent initially but gave rich accounts about informal processes once a level of anonymity was agreed (also Ripoll Servent:2010). As Gamson says, those 'with less invested...do more freely offer candid insights into the way the system operates' (1995:87). In interviews the type of question affects the response given (McDowell:1998:2143, Keats:2000:34). I began with grand tour questions to relax participants (Schwartzman:1993:58) and asked open questions to allow them to ruminate, speak in their own framework, and introduce new perspectives (Byrne:2004:182) - vital in exploratory work to avoid limiting responses to what you already know (Maxwell:2005:94). Many interviewees were familiar with academic research and in wave 4 were used as 'sound-boards' for my concepts (Walford:1994:227). The interviews were triangulated with each other and the other methods to illuminate processes occurring in a mainstream centre group.

Methods used to explore ways of working in organisations should allow us to see people in action and also accounting for actions. Interviews gave me access to the local perspective and the opportunity to discuss socialisation, motivations, and strategies by discussing their views and experiences of their own and others' behaviour. They enabled me to triangulate my participant observation data and explore how typical the way the MEP and office worked was within the case-study group and illuminated any peculiarities. Using purposeful sampling (Patton:2002:230) I sought interviewees who were knowledgeable about issues thrown up by fieldwork (e.g. the role of co-ordinators) as well as a range of perspectives (e.g. new and experienced MEPs from ten member-states). This meant I could explore wider processes operating within the context as discussed.

2.3.4.3 Staff Survey

I also conducted a survey with the MEP assistants to explore the ideas I was developing about their role (Chapter 6) and to illuminate wider processes and assess how typical the fieldwork office was and highlight any peculiarities. Questionnaires are most useful when used in conjunction with other methods and when you have a clear idea of what you want to study (Grix:2004:128). The survey emerged from the wave 2 assistant interviews. As discussed, qualitative researchers are *bricoleurs* grabbing whatever tools are at hand. A pilot

survey was discussed with the MEP's assistant and circulated by email to the NPD's assistants on 2/7/2010. They were given three weeks to respond and eight did. The responses were used to develop the questions to ensure accessibility (Appendix-C).

The questions were designed primarily to explore the assistants' social profile, their role, and where they get information from – to explore ideas I was developing from participant observation. The survey was emailed to the MEP global address list on 23/11/2010. It requested eight pieces of voluntary information and consisted of 15 open-ended questions; 48 assistants from 20 countries and 7 groups returned the survey. Whilst this is a low return rate, the (qualitative) survey was designed to gather detail and explore processes rather than to make statistical inferences²⁸. Produced in MS Word, it allowed respondents to type as much as they wanted. Whilst some gave single sentences, others wrote pages (e.g. respondent-37 returned 4 pages) meaning the exercise produced rich detail about assistants' daily tasks.

2.3.5 Data Analysis

The detailed data gathered with these methods were systematically analysed. Emerson et al particularly provided guidance on this process: I carried out 'open' and 'focused' coding and wrote 'initial', 'integrative', and 'theoretical' memos (1995:142-168). From January 2011 I began coding the data and wrote initial memos. The supervisor dispatches (which already contained layers of interpretation) were invaluable in this process. The idea of structuring the thesis around key (everyday) sites in which politics is practiced emerged from this process, and according to the iterative nature of the project, these were later conceptualised as CoPs²⁹.

The bulk of the coding was done intensively May-August 2011. The field-notes were openly coded and insightful moments and recurring themes which emerged, along with key

²⁸ The return rate cannot be calculated because we cannot know the exact number of assistants and interns in each office.

²⁹ I note, an MEP's committee(s) is an important CoP in which they (can) spend a lot of their time and is a key element of Ringe's PPC mechanism. However, the MEP did not spend much time on committee work during the fieldwork, focusing instead on his delegation. Due to my expressed interest in group processes, we divided the labour in the office (Chapter 6) to enable me to cover these meetings. Therefore I did not have sufficient data to include a chapter on the committee as a CoP. However Chapter 5 gives sufficient attention to committee work for the narrative presented. For more on the EP committees see; Ringe (2010), Postu (2012), and Whitaker (2011, 2001).

themes from the initial memos, were developed into nodes for focused coding³⁰. The nodes were then analysed and integrative memos written tying data together which evolved into the five chapters to constitute an inductive analysis. Other pieces written alongside the empirical chapters acted as theoretical memos and helped to iteratively develop the theoretical framework and narrative.

The surveys were examined during fieldwork but the intensive collation and analysis of the returns was conducted in Autumn 2011 for Chapter 6. The ordinal data (Section 1) were collated and the open questions coded and analysed and illustrative quotations harvested (Mason:2002:183). Finally, the MEP and other key interviews were transcribed verbatim during fieldwork, the coding process, and after wave four. Partial transcripts were made for some less focused interviews. Focused coding was practiced to the nodes.

These ‘qualitative analytical coding’ practices draw on methods developed by those taking a grounded approach who prioritise developing rather than verifying analytical propositions, discovering new ideas, and focusing the analysis on the local perspective (Glaser&Strauss:1967, Bryman:2001:387). It was important to triangulate the data and take a critical and reflective approach, particularly to the interview data, because whilst insightful, participants’ responses may be offering a validating account of themselves, their role, and/or institution (Ball:1994:99).

2.3.6 Ethnographic Writing

Writing is an essential part of the qualitative research process. I began drafting the empirical chapters from the memos in Autumn 2011 and constantly re-worked them as the theoretical framework was developed and the narrative was developed and integrated. Writing is a reflexive and dialectical interplay between the theoretical and empirical - where the researcher’s (philosophical and disciplinary) assumptions and concerns are ever present - and this constant tacking ‘often reshapes our theoretical ideas as well as our view of the empirical data’ and produces new knowledge (Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:15,174). The goal of fieldwork is to generate new theory which emerges from the setting and the ethnographer’s interpretation of the field-notes, but which is also relevant to the scholarly community. Ethnographic texts are written *for* a (disciplinary) audience (Emerson et al:1995:167). This

³⁰ Organisational culture, EP identity, assistants, and group, office, influence, and socialisation processes.

has been a constant concern throughout this project. As an inter-disciplinary endeavour, this project has had the advantage of two disciplines' tools and knowledge. However, I have also faced the challenge of presenting the findings in a way which interests both of these audiences as well as European Studies scholars. I have done this primarily through the crafting of the research issues which respond to debates in European Studies, but are also relevant to Political Science and Anthropology audiences.

Ethnographic writing is concerned with developing a persuasive narrative. This requires linking data, theories, and arguments on the page. To write an ethnographic text the author has to select and creatively present an illuminating slice of the data (excerpts and quotes) and present a coherent story about life in the field-site which also sheds light on scholarly concerns. There are a variety of reasons for selecting data and it is not a case of selecting the most interesting bits; selections might be typical, epitomising, or alternatively evocative, exceptional, or transgressing - but are particularly persuasive examples of the author's argument (Emerson et al:1995:169-208). Mason (2002) argues qualitative researchers should make (convincing) arguments, meaning the construction of a perspective, interpretation, or line of analysis which requires a relational process with those to whom the argument is being made. How arguments are constituted and expressed is fundamental, and this requires reflection on the 'type' of argument being made, what the research design can validly claim, and how data are used to do this. This project best fits Mason's 'mechanical' argument type concerning how processes operate and argues 'interpretively and narratively' (2002:175-7). In selecting data she urges us to consider whether data are illustrative or constitutive of the argument (2002:183). As many scholars have urged, ethnographers must reflect upon their methodological choices and position in the field and research, at every stage until the final text is crafted.

2.4 Methodological Reflections

2.4.1 Partial Truths: reflexivity and quality

Assessing quality in qualitative research is notoriously difficult. There are no universal criteria such as reliability and validity (Kirk&Miller:1986:19). The validity literature is 'muddled to the point of making it unrecognisable' (Morse et al:2002:15) and lacks consensus, although Lincoln and Guba's schema is widely quoted (see Sandelowski:1986,

Adcock&Collier:2001:536, Seale:1999). A researcher's position in this debate usually reflects their ontology because 'what is valid knowledge is linked to the philosophical question of what is truth' (Kvale:1995:23).

Keats' flexible definition helps facilitate dialogue; validity is 'concerned with how well the research instrument measures what it is intended to measure' (2000:77). We must ask: (1) is the method right for the question (does it observe what it claims and intends to) and (2) how well does it observe the phenomenon? (Mason:2002:39, Keats:2000:77). Sections 1 and 2 have addressed the first question. They have shown that ethnography is the most appropriate methodological approach to the research question and that the methods observe what they intend to: MEPs' everyday practice of politics inside the EP from the local perspective. Ethnography enables us to take a holistic approach and explore everyday MEP behaviour in context from the local perspective. The research design is fit for purpose, coherent, and displays consistency between its philosophical position and methods and therefore the methods observe what they claim to - the everyday practice of politics inside the EP by individual MEPs and their perspective on their daily endeavour. Participant observation enabled direct and sustained observation of MEPs' activities and routines inside the EP and the interviews and survey provided access to actors' views and perspective on this social practice. Section 3 now addresses the second prong and explores how well the methods were able to explore the research question by reflecting on the key methodological issues which position this partial account.

Interpretivists reject the notion of objective reality and therefore have different conceptions of the purpose of research; originality and discovery are valued in exploratory case-study research (Seale:2004:72). Qualitative scholars have produced alternative validity criteria which can be engaged with to examine how well methods explore research aims. Lincoln and Guba assess quality through credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity. Credibility is assessed on prolonged engagement, triangulation, and reflexivity (in Seale:2004:77). This project has engaged with these criteria through prolonged participant observation and triangulation of this data with interview and survey data to present a credible account of the field-site (Seale:1999).

Reflexivity has been an essential part of the process. Reflexivity means reflecting on and acknowledging influences on the research process which affect how (well) you, as the

research instrument, are able to collect data; ‘adequate anthropological accounts cannot be crafted without acknowledging the forces – epistemological or political – that condition their writing’ (Whitaker:2002:470). Ethnographers are reflexive about their predispositions, design (Byrne:2004:184), and process because ‘the activity of the knower influences what is known since nothing can be known apart from these activities’ (in Dunne et al:2005:21). Reflexivity does not stop after fieldwork and must be ‘continuously performed’ (Haggerty:2003:158) also through interpretation and writing because the researcher is ‘suffused’ throughout the text (Bell:1999).

This section reflects on my position in the field and research and how this shaped the production of this text (Puwar:1997). It is widely acknowledged that ethnographic texts are ‘partial truths’ (Clifford:1986). A researcher’s position in the field-site as well as their academic field means an ethnographer knows from a certain position (Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:25). Ethnographic writing is determined contextually, rhetorically, generically (as a genre), institutionally (school of thought), politically, and historically. Clifford evokes the Cree hunter who said when describing his society, ‘I’m not sure I can tell the whole truth...I can only tell what I know’ (1986:6-8). Ethnographers produce their account of the field-site as they experienced it from their position among participants at that moment (Denzin&Lincoln:1998:1-5). However, acknowledging positionality is not an excuse to shy away from theorizing (Wedeen:2010:263). Performing reflexivity means positionality can be acknowledged and researchers explore how (well) their position enabled them to investigate the research question. ‘Studying up’ in elite political settings means particular methodological issues arise which shape the production of an ethnographic text.

2.4.2 Elite Research: power and access

Political ethnographers often conduct fieldwork in elite political settings, the nature of which affect the data they are (un)able to collect. Richards defines ‘elite’ as a group of individuals who hold ‘a privileged position in a society’ (1996:199). However Dexter says an elite interview is ‘for any interviewee who is given special, non-standardized treatment’ (1970:5) because they have specialist knowledge - due to or about a privileged position - which researchers seek. Therefore the researcher is eager for the participant to teach them,

stress their definition, structure the account, and define what is relevant (Dexter:1970:5) – a scenario familiar to ethnographers and approach I took to understand the local perspective.

(Political) elites may be aware of your institution and research *you* because elites are likely to be conscious to control the image projected of themselves and their institution and are more likely to read accounts than the subjects of early ethnographies (Ybemba et al:2009:4), raising the issue of elite censorship. Concern was only manifest with a few participants (who did agree to take part): for example an assistant asked if I was a eurosceptic because then he would not continue (Interview-38) and an official familiar with Abélès' work said it had 'caused quite a stir' so he was looking forward to reading mine (Interview-13). However it was more common that participants were interested by my research, particularly those with a social science background, although some were amused by my interest in banality. One MEP said he thought he had not told me anything interesting when I had found the discussion about his co-ordinator role fascinating (Interview-41). The MEP sometimes joked he was my 'lab rat' although at times he would more seriously acknowledge his consciousness that I was observing him and draw my attention to things he thought were important. Sustained contact with (elite) field-sites means the ethnographer's presence ceases to be a disturbance so they can observe what participants 'do' rather than 'say they do' (Malinowski:1922:1-25).

Politicians - public figures - have a public and personal investment in participating and research involving politicians is 'highly political' and the inherent power imbalances mean it can be 'game-like' (Ball:1994:96-99). MEPs are used to giving interviews. One indicated exactly which parts he was not happy to be cited (Interview-32) and five said they wanted to see any directly attributed quotations. (Elite) political settings mean working with informants who are likely to want to protect their privileged position: politicians and staff. They possess the means and skills to control the release of information about themselves and their work. Therefore constant attention must be paid to the power relationships and authority structures into which you enter, your informants are part of, and which shape your research process (Forsey:2004:69, Pierce:1995:95). (Elite) political research questions orthodox ethnographic wisdom which has assumed ethnographers exercise textual and social authority and are the experts. Critical literature often focuses on giving power back to subjects, but elite political research questions how ethnographic authority plays out in field-sites where power relationships aren't this clear cut (Pierce:1995:94-5). Here, we are

the supplicant 'requesting time and expertise from the powerful, with little to offer in return' (in Cochrane:1998:2123).

Elite interviews are 'high-preparation, high-risk and high-gain operations' (Wengraf in Byrne:2004:188) but you can be left feeling you have learnt little. Political scientists have raised the issue of subjects lying or giving the party-line. Berry (2002) advises evaluating informants' passion and dispassion, exaggeration and self-effacing behaviour, and probing and digression on data collection. Puwar (1997) suggests establishing that you are not a journalist so politicians can alter their style. However Dean and Whyte remind us that subjects' statements range between subjective and objective and evaluating this and the context is part of analysis (1958:120). Prolonged immersion helps ethnographers to formulate probing questions and build rapport. Ethnographers build relationships, trust, and negotiate sensitive power terrains over time, whilst being more aware of the status of information, motivations, and also consider what they may not have been given access to and why.

The first hurdle is gaining initial site access. Elites can be difficult to penetrate and have legal and cultural means to deflect researchers, hide behind gatekeepers, and make you wait on and for the day, determining the pace of research (Fitz&Halpin:1994:48,34). Interview and observation requests go ignored and many interviews were changed and some rearranged minutes beforehand. However obstruction is not always the case and I was offered two internships and only refused six MEP interviews. Some MEPs and officials were particularly interested in the public knowing more about their work but their accounts are also selective narratives. Organising the fieldwork internship meant negotiating permission and a role with a key sponsor and issues included whether I expected to be paid and what I could give in return: i.e. free labour. This meant the relationship was more flexible than it might have been but had methodological implications, discussed below.

Conditions of access move inside institutions and there is always potential for access to change whenever elites choose. Initial access is just the first step, once inside this initial trust 'is a delicate gift, easily broken' (Barbour&Schostak:2005:42) and relationship negotiation is a continuous process (Maxwell:2005, Bell:1999) in observation and interviews but particularly with a key sponsor. Immersion means ethnographers can have the chance to gain a better grasp of the political games encountered by interviewers. I had

the opportunity to build relationships and move beyond initial games, but immersion meant I was then drawn into games and relationships which shaped the data I could gather, by becoming associated with informants in a party-system and hierarchy.

2.4.3 Positionality: researcher role, presentation, and insider research

The initial access point has wide methodological implications. It determines who you get to meet and what you get to observe, how people position and react to you, the relationships you form, and hence the data you are (un)able to collect and picture you (can) build (O'Reilly:2009:6-10). Ethnographers are simultaneously positioned by participants as they position themselves in the field (Forsey:2004:60). Three key aspects of the role I negotiated positioned me in the field-site and thus shape the partial nature of this ethnographic account. The role I performed was an intern, for a UK MEP, from a mainstream centre group. Positioning myself as an *MEP's* intern enabled me to observe how an individual MEP practices politics here: the backstage organisation and preparation of an MEP's time and performances. The in-depth understanding of office and group processes gained from access to one MEP in one group outweighs breadth which might have been gained from an a-political role. Another advantage was that insiders could easily relate to the position (Bell:1999); many stagiaires come and go every year and are expected to ask questions about how things work. Being an intern anywhere means mucking in with banal tasks and this low ranking position gave me access to the informal side of institutional life and depth which could not have been gained by shadowing higher positions, although I triangulated with senior official interviews (Coghlan&Brannick:2005:69).

By positioning myself with(in) one group, I immediately closed off access to others. However this is part of the case-study nature of this research and I do not claim to make generalisations about the group or EP but illuminate processes. Being positioned within a mainstream centre group means this is a partial account of political life from the perspective of those playing this political game and reflecting upon this was key to the argument made in Chapter 4. Fieldwork being conducted with a UK MEP meant I observed EP politics from this position and many of my key informants came from this NPD, although this does not mean they were all British. Again participant observation data was triangulated with other data collected to gather other perspectives on the processes I was exploring. Fieldwork meant I spent prolonged time with the group, in committees, and

working with offices from other NPDs. I became concerned I was spending too much time with the NPD, particularly its assistants, but reflection found this was in fact an important finding (Chapters 5-7).

Political settings are a landscape rife with complex relationships and there are also informal relations to consider (Coghlan&Brannick:2005:72-25). Friendships, grudges, and competition between insiders, particularly with your key sponsor, may affect who will speak to you, their motivations, and the information they give. They may not want the sponsor to know something or want to challenge the perspective they assume they will provide. My sponsor was extremely knowledgeable and helpful, was well known and respected among colleagues and officials, and suggested some helpful interviewees. One said she only accepted the interview because of him (Interview-27), although I felt others wished to ensure their perspective was included.

The way you present yourself personally in the field and what you 'do' there shapes the way relationships form; 'the personal characteristics of the fieldworker mediate the cultural scenes that unfold in their presence' (Bell:1999:23). In elite settings, balance must be maintained between 'expert and ignoramus' (McDowell:1998:2137). Whilst politicians (and officials) do not suffer fools and require knowledgeable staff, researchers must appear to want knowledge too, particularly to enable discussion about taken-for-granted processes. I had to learn to conduct the intern role competently to understand the local perspective and maintain a good relationship with my sponsor. However, researchers must also retain distance to enable analysis. Some choose to differentiate themselves through dress or by carrying research tools. Whilst I did this during interviews it was inappropriate for the role so I maintained distance by keeping reflective field-notes and one analytical *eye tightly focused* on my project. Researchers take different approaches to building rapport. I maintained an agreeable relationship with my sponsor which was negotiated over a long period and building this was assisted by my insider status.

Being a supporter of the MEP's party helped me obtain the internship and build rapport. However access advantage should be considered alongside the literature on insider research. Some scholars believe insider ethnography enhances the possibility of going native and issues such as distorting personal relationships, wanting to champion colleagues, and not being critical enough, meaning you do not probe deeply enough and produce

erroneous conclusions (Coghlan&Brannick:2005:65, O'Reilly:2009:80). Insiders have been criticised for not experiencing the cultural shock which is traditionally said to assist analytical thinking. However, insiders claim this is actually bad for rapport and promote advantages such as themselves being informants, enhanced trust, empathy and ultimately understanding (O'Reilly:2009:114). Immersion in an elite political setting may mean working on causes you become involved with, perhaps more so for insiders. However I believe the risks exist for ethnographers working anywhere. Some researchers seek to de-familiarise the familiar by looking for symbolic boundaries to make the banal peculiar (Inglis:2005:11). However the field-site was unfamiliar and reflective field-notes focused on my research helped further alleviate these issues. Again the survey and interviews with informants outside my immediate setting helped me see past personal relationships and key informants' perspectives. Academic research is assessed on the quality of the inquiry, not our success in our research role or the organisation, and differentiating our identities and research goals from the organisation's can help. It has also been crucial that this thesis is not an analysis of the party itself (Coghlan&Brannick:2005:47).

2.4.4 Research Relationships and Ethics

Dual identity is a fundamental part of ethnography, a tension inherent in the (oxymoronic) term 'participant observation'. Rather than the juxtaposition of contradictory terms there is a participant-observation continuum and your place moves depending on practical and ethical issues. Hermeneutic research emphasises participation to enable experience of what 'actually' happens because understanding requires participation in the co-construction of reality. Meaningful interpretation comes from thorough immersion (O'Reilly:2009:158-161) but ethnographers simultaneously observe as outsiders with a 'heightened sense of awareness' (Spradley:1980:56). Understanding the local perspective required working and therefore bonding with participants and gaining insight into their lives, whilst simultaneously analysing their behaviour, which raises ethical issues.

Maintaining role duality is problematic if role performance affects research relationships. I established expectations early and kept the sponsor updated, maintaining this relationship and establishing others through time and expectation management. Ethnographers *are* the research instrument so onus is put on the individual to work, collect data, reflect, and maintain relationships; inevitably fieldwork is an emotional experience. Balancing

involvement and detachment can become so overwhelming it leads to detachment in both (Coghlan&Brannick:2005:68); particularly when navigating relationships with informants who become friends. In Brussels, work and private lives blur as expats socialise frequently in work clothes at networking events, Place Lux(embourg), and during weekends, so using this data required reflection. Navigation was occasionally jolted when participants signalled a boundary by saying, *you're not going to write about that are you?* This would spark discussion about my research. Usually it followed irrelevant gossip, as I assured them. However occasionally when it followed a view on an interesting process, I tried to arrange an interview. However usually, it expressed disbelief at my interest in banality and was not used about constitutive parts of the argument. This phrase exemplifies how access and ethics are on-going processes (Maxwell:2005, Piper&Simons:2005).

I engaged with Robson's three ethical concerns: voluntary informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity (2000:28). The survey email informed respondents about the research; they replied voluntarily to my EP or Sussex email; the returns were kept securely and not discussed; were numbered to ensure anonymity and respondents could choose how much personal information to provide (Appendix-C). The interviews were conducted voluntarily, and some assistants and officials actively volunteered (Interviews-4,6,16,22,36,46). Interviewees were emailed a research summary or this was provided in the email. No assistant refused, one official refused (believing he could not add to his colleague's knowledge), and three did not reply. Six MEPs refused (all but one citing time constraints) and times could not be found with six others. All recordings and transcripts were kept securely and confidential. Only one interviewee asked to edit his transcript which again raises the issue of elite control and political nature of research (Ball:1994, Barbour&Schostak:2005:41). Interview content was not discussed with other participants. One interviewee was uncomfortable about being seen interviewed by other colleagues in an EP bar, so I arranged more private locations afterwards. All citations were agreed individually. Most MEPs were happy to be quoted whereas staff preferred anonymity and we agreed varying levels of discretion. This was occasionally frustrating with some officials when more specific job titles could add credibility.

Ethical issues were continuously navigated during the participant observation. The MEP took part voluntarily. When I initially requested the internship, I explained the purpose and sent a proposal summary which we discussed in the interview (September 2009). The

placement was confirmed in October and in May he confirmed he saw no difficulties if it was “handled with sensitivity”. We discussed my aims at the initial role briefing in June. We conducted a formal interview and intermittently discussed my research. In December we reviewed the materials I wanted to take away; e.g. the diary and email counts. In Spring 2011 I sent him methodological reflections and in Spring 2012 early drafts of Chapters 5 and 7 which rely heavily on participant observation data.

My field-notes were kept securely and confidentially. By conducting the research openly other participants are aware of the sponsor’s identity. This is why, despite issues of elite censorship, it was important to carefully navigate which excerpts were included because ethnographers have a duty not to harm participants (e.g. by disrupting relationships or careers). If moments were not constitutive and may have harmed the sponsor, they were not selected. Anonymity was the most problematic criteria. The sponsor participated anonymously. The research was presented as a case-study of his group. However during the writing process, I felt naming the group *and* NPD would have meant the pool of candidates was too narrow. As the group, beyond being a mainstream centre group rather than a eurosceptic one, was not constitutive of the narrative, I decided to refer to the group thus to balance anonymity and my duty to academia to present a full and accurate account.

Initial access is the first step and once inside relationship negotiation is continuous (Barbour&Schostak:2005, Maxwell:2005). This raises ethical issues because you cannot wear an “Anthropologist” t-shirt. Although access was granted by the sponsor, once inside I wanted to conduct the research as openly as possible and felt further informed consent was required. I learned from preliminary research (Interview-2) that I would work closely with other assistants, so informed the MEP’s assistants about the aims immediately and the NPD assistants at our first assistants’ meeting (Chapter 6). I informed EP and group officials the office worked with regularly about my dual role, and subsequently interviewed some of them, and the MEP sometimes introduced me thus in private meetings. As it emerged the role of the NPD would be important, I sent their offices an email about the research in September and interviewed some of them in wave three. Finally I discussed the group processes I was interested in with the MEP. As I was interested in individual MEPs’ interactions with the group structure he did not think this would be a problem and his experience was triangulated with interview data.

During the writing process I wanted to include (constitutive) details of group meeting processes. Therefore I took a draft of this section to an interview with the Secretary-General which he confirmed he was happy with, although corrected some procedural errors. During fieldwork I considered sending an email to all the group's MEPs. However academic research must balance duties to participants with a duty to academia to present a full and accurate account. I decided this might lead to further censorship and, as stated, we also have a duty to study up with elites whose decisions affect citizens. Therefore I sought consent and validation from the sponsor and group officials. This process contributed to my decision to refer to the group as *a centre mainstream group*. These discussions show ethical principles are abstract and can conflict and 'the balancing of such principles in concrete situations is the ultimate ethical act' (Piper&Simons:2005:56). Proximity raises ethical issues but it is embeddedness which enables ethnography to gain its distinctive depth (see Fine et al:2009, Cerwonka&Malkki:2007).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that ethnography is the most appropriate methodological approach to the research question. A more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour requires a more holistic methodological approach. Ethnography's core tenants (an actor-centred and context-sensitive approach) and the in-depth qualitative methods associated with it and employed in this project, have enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of MEP behaviour in this social context, enabling me to explore how individual MEPs practice politics inside the EP. Quality has been addressed by ensuring the design is consistent and coherent and therefore the instruments observe what they intend to. Immersion and triangulation have been employed to ensure credibility. The research process has been reflected upon to examine how well the instruments addressed the research question, and methodological issues have been discussed which position this partial account. Reflexivity acknowledges what a methodology can claim to know, a key part of assessing validity being knowing the nature, potential, and limitations of methods. All designs make trade-offs and whilst ethnography cannot, and does not aim to, offer generalisations and statistical inferences, it does offer rich insight into actors' behaviour in their context; access to their perspective and dynamic interactions between structures and agents; and a nuanced understanding of processes.

I now clarify how each of the research issues has been addressed. The thesis firstly builds on Ringe's work and further explores how individual MEPs decide how to vote. Ethnography gave me access to the backstage and I was able to observe how the exchange of information he identifies occurs through the process of voting list construction and the meetings which constitute this process. I observed MEPs' dynamic interactions with the group and NPD structures and discussed the meaning(s) generated around these structures in interviews. As Von Rosenstiel says, 'organisations are systems created by people which gain significance for their members by virtue of their perception and interpretation' (2004:136, Chapters 5-7). It, secondly, explores how individual MEPs perform multiple roles. Ethnographic fieldwork gave me direct and sustained contact with the field-site observing and participating in the organisation of an MEP's time and activities from his office. I observed frontstage performances and backstage preparations and how different roles are performed in different spaces, but also how performances are strategically planned across the EP calendar. During the interviews, I also explored the institutional role MEPs perform (Chapters 5 & 8). Thirdly, the thesis explores the constraints and opportunities MEPs face and are presented with as they practice politics here. Ethnography again enabled me to go backstage and observe how an MEP pursues his aims and interests in this context, and the tools and strategies he employs. I experienced the EP habitus and discussed this with interviewees. The case-study enabled me to investigate this field's system of positions and I discussed with participants their experience of this and how they accumulate capital and play the game successfully (Chapters 4 & 8).

Ethnography got me closer to the actors doing European politics and their perspective, enabling me to address the research question. The detailed everyday and individual-level data collected provides a more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour than is currently available. The rich data is one element of this project's original contribution. However ethnography does not exist in isolation from theory (Wedeen:2010:263). Chapter 3 next outlines the theoretical framework employed in this thesis because 'without theoretical considerations and without attempting to explain the processes, generative mechanisms and dynamics which make the observed events possible, we would be left with pure selective descriptions' and this would not meet the criteria for critical and reflective social science (Wodak:2009:118).

Chapter 3:

Theoretical Chapter: Performing politics in the backstage communities of this political field

‘To understand the EU as a distinctive form of social organisation and power structure ... one has to get inside the politics to know who the individuals and groups making up the EU are, where they come from, what kinds of resources and networks they have access to, how they perceive their roles, the institutions in which they work and, more broadly, the social world around them’
(Kauppi:2011:151).

3.1 Introduction

This study goes backstage to explore the everyday practice of politics by MEPs inside the EP. Whilst ethnographic fieldwork provides rich data and valuable insights, ‘it is not sufficient to make empirical observations; these very rarely succeed in capturing the underlying mechanisms producing phenomena’ and theoretical considerations are required to analyse descriptions (Wodak:2009:118, see Wedeen:2010:267). This chapter outlines the interdisciplinary framework woven throughout this thesis, which explores **the everyday practice and performance of politics by actors in the backstage communities of practice and spaces of this transnational political field**. I constructed the framework by combining concepts from Goffman (1959), Wenger et al (2002), and Bourdieu (1990, 1977) and drew on and owe much to Wodak (2009) and Adler-Nissen’s (2009, 2008) recent applications. The lens elucidates dynamic interactions between structures and agents and thus enables the thesis to pursue its objectives of bringing actors and agency into the study of MEP behaviour and exploring the role of the group structure from the local perspective. The research approaches politics as an activity performed on a daily basis by individuals within particular social spaces and therefore provides flesh in addition to the bones of Political Science models of MEP behaviour.

The framework firstly draws on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy metaphor and distinction between the front and backstage. I approach MEPs as actors preparing backstage to give credible performances to convince and persuade other actors of their position. Once we delve backstage inside organisations, we find multiple co-existing communities of practice (CoPs). The framework secondly draws on Wenger et al’s (2002) CoP concept: collegial groups who share information on a regular basis to further a common domain. I outline their roles which include fostering expert knowledge and socialising newcomers. Conceptualising the EP groups as CoPs can help us understand dynamic interactions

between MEPs and these structures. The framework thirdly draws on Bourdieu's thinking tools to conceptualise the EP as a transnational political field. This approach enables me to explore the habitus and doxa individual MEPs practice politics within, strategies they follow, and the valid types of capital they accumulate to give supported performances in backstage CoPs - to exert influence and play the political game successfully. This framework was constructed iteratively through the combination of concepts found to enhance understanding of processes observed in the field. It addresses the research question by enhancing our understanding of MEPs' practice of politics through its approach to politics as a social activity conducted by people in particular spaces. This chapter discusses inter-disciplinarity then introduces the dramaturgy metaphor, CoPs, and Bourdieu's thinking tools, before outlining how the framework is applied.

3.2 An Inter-disciplinary Approach

3.2.1 Theory and Inter-disciplinarity

Good theory orders empirical research and simplifies the social world. However beyond this, there is no consensus on its role in research because of different starting points and traditions. The human sciences are characterised by 'a confused, misused, and inconsistent lexicon of key terms' (Merton in Grix:2004:101). The dominant understanding of theory and its application has been strongly influenced by natural science where theory is an explanation often consisting of a system of law-like statements. However, theory is used in a wider variety of ways in social research within paradigms. Interpretivists see theory as deriving from data collection and as helping us to understand the social world by interpreting how people conduct their daily lives. Interpretivists often build middle-range or grounded theory inductively, rather than deductively testing derived hypotheses. However Grix notes most researchers use induction and deduction, starting with initial ideas then constantly moving between data and abstraction (2004:100-115).

Cerwonka experienced paradigmatic tensions when her positivist supervisor accused her (ethnographic) fieldwork of leading her theory, concerned for generalisability. Ethnographies cannot be generalised but provide more than thick description 'in so far as they develop theoretical insights from the empirical material in relation to existing theories and studies' (Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:117). In ethnographic knowledge production,

fieldwork does lead theory, drawing on it to interpret cultural phenomena as they are encountered. Ethnography is principally eclectic and Willis argues ethnographers should 'only use a theory if it creates illumination, casts light on things, helps you present a phenomenon more fully' (in Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:118). Cerwonka and Malkki refer to their use of theory as 'tacking', or constant movement, between the theoretical and empirical in a dialectic which reshapes our empirical and theoretical ideas and creatively produces new knowledge (2007:14,179).

I have combined concepts which illuminated processes I experienced in the field. This approach reflects the project's exploratory interdisciplinary nature. Interdisciplinary research integrates theoretical approaches and creates new approaches capable of operating across disciplinary boundaries (Wodak:2009:33). Whilst many funders champion inter-disciplinarity, there is little discussion about methodology (Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:8,13-15,164). For those who do it, interdisciplinary research is worthwhile due to its flexibility and ability to confront complex social objects and paint a more holistic rather than discipline-focused picture.

3.2.2 Goffman and Bourdieu

Combining Goffman's dramaturgy metaphor and Bourdieu's thinking tools enables us to take the more actor-centred and context-sensitive approach to MEP behaviour sought by this project. It enables us to explore the attributes and resources required to give successful performances in this field. Like Adler-Nissen's, my framework does not reflect these scholars' 'entire conceptual arsenals' but is project driven (2009:87). Strong ties exist between their writing despite Goffman's suspicion of grand schemes: they invented rare methods and considered the micro-events out of which politics is contrived (Lemert:1997:xii, Fine&Manning:2000:43). They 'refrained from abstract system-building in favour of embedding theory in empirical practice' (Calhoun:2000:282). Goffman's conceptual elaboration was based on his fieldwork observations (Samra-Fredericks&Bargiela-Chiappini:2008:654, Fine&Manning:2000:44) and Bourdieu, a self-taught ethnographer, saw theory as best developed during empirical analysis (Calhoun:2000:280-3, Fowler:2001).

Both scholars integrate structure and agency. Bourdieu drew on Goffman and others who stressed ‘the ways in which interaction shapes who the actors are and what strategies they pursue’ (Calhoun:2000:290). Rather than treating individuals as either autonomous or socially constructed, Goffman (1959) explored how order is reproduced in interaction. Bourdieu stresses improvisation and adaptation rather than simple rule-following and actors as dynamic figures within the social order. Bourdieu’s favourite metaphor was games and Goffman’s was drama ‘but they shared the sense of social life as a performance that could be played better or worse, and which nearly always tended to the reproduction of social order’ (Calhoun:2000:282). Bourdieu (1983) praised Goffman as ‘the discoverer of the infinitely small’. Goffman sought to grasp the intricate but often decisive aspects of social existence, such as strategies engaged in during banal moments. With this perspective the world becomes a theatre and we can extract the forms that give constancy and meaning to everyday interaction; e.g. strategies made possible by the frontstage-backstage distinction (Bourdieu:1983:112-113). These themes resonate throughout this thesis which explores the everyday practice of politics by actors in the EP’s backstage communities and the strategies they employ to play the political game more successfully.

3.3 Performing Politics

The framework firstly draws on Goffman’s dramaturgy metaphor and distinction between the front and backstage. The research approaches MEPs as actors preparing and rehearsing backstage to ‘give’ credible frontstage performances of their ‘self’ - as validated and supported by the surrounding social system – in order to convince and persuade other actors of their position to exert influence. It sees MEPs as actors performing multiple roles by changing masks according to the audience as they move between backstage CoPs.

3.3.1 Dramaturgy Metaphor

3.3.1.1 Dramaturgical Vocabulary

Goffman (1959) presented a theatrical, or dramaturgical, vocabulary with which to describe everyday social encounters. He outlines six dramaturgical themes - the performance, team, region, discrepant roles, communication out of character, and

impression management – as general features of social interaction. He uses extended metaphorical description to analyse social situations. He fully exploited the analytical resources of the metaphor, looking at everyday social interactions as performances. Goffman assumes individuals try to control the impression others receive of their actions and present the best version of themselves through impression management techniques.

Branaman (1997) says the central idea in Goffman's thought is that 'the self' is a social product, in two senses. Firstly 'the self' is the product of the performances put on in social situations and arises as a result of publicly validated performances. Although individuals actively fashion self-indicating performances, they are constrained to present an image which is socially supported in the context of a status hierarchy and 'performances are embedded in surrounding social systems' (Manning:2008:680). Secondly, the degree to which the individual is able to sustain a respectable self-image in the eyes of others depends on their access to structural resources and possession of attributes deemed desirable by the dominant culture. In most circumstances, people have access to sufficient resources to produce a respectable 'self' in sync with the social order, so honour its rules and accept their allotted places (Branaman:1997:xlvi,liii).

The structure of 'the self' can be seen in terms of how we arrange for (role) performances in society. However, behind role performances, a performer has a continuing personal biography (Branaman:1997:l). The etymology of the word 'person' is 'mask' and it is 'a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role' (Goffman:1959a:62). Chriss says Goffman did not problematise 'roles' like Simmel, but tried to make it a more malleable concept to stress the agentic nature of roles: 'if culture provides the script to actors performing roles, Goffman reminds us that actors sometimes flub their lines' (1999:72).

The dramaturgical approach can be interpreted as a cynical view of social life, with its implications that relationships are inauthentic and self-serving, and social relations organised around appearance, because dramaturgical analysis is underpinned by a 'two-selves' thesis. The first self is a public performer with carefully managed impressions and the second is a cynical manipulator hidden behind (Fine&Manning:2000:45-46, Lemert:1997:xxxii). Goffman said the successful staging of a confidence man and a

character staged in a theatre both require the use of techniques, 'the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real social situations' (in Lemert:1997:xxxvi). Chriss separates Goffman from the impression management tradition that followed, arguing his actor puts on different masks for different audiences 'in an effort to comport him or herself to the exigencies of the social gathering and to uphold the definition of the situation' rather than because of a hidden agenda (1999:67).

Performance entails individuals' attempt to impress upon others that their character and definition of the situation is what they claim (Branaman:1997:lxiv). Goffman identified seven performance elements and Wodak (2009:7-9) highlights belief, dramatic realisation, and mystification as key to the performance of professionals, including politicians. Politicians need belief in the part they are playing so others believe they are performing their innermost thoughts and perceive them as credible. Dramatic realisation is then the portrayal of aspects the performer wants the audience to know which means using the correct signals to gain trust. Mystification refers to the insinuated concealment of information which maintains a distance to keep people in awe. Observing the mundane activities of politicians shows that content and their posture, conversation styles, and demeanour change when confronted with different audiences. Politicians wear different masks depending on the audience they are performing to. Different roles require different performances to be credible and thus successful (Wodak:2009:xii).

A performance is 'given' if it is intended to influence other participants' understanding of a situation. A front includes props which enable a performer to conjure a desired self-image; e.g. a lawyer convinces a jury with their professional appearance and manner in as much as their legal argument (Fine&Manning:2000). Meanwhile people try to distinguish between the 'given' (planted) and 'given off' elements of a performance, an essential distinction for politicians' credibility. The key to dramaturgical success is to control the audience's access to information so that 'given' elements are believed to be 'given off': e.g. a politician might appear knowledgeable while the audience remains unaware of a frantic briefing which occurred minutes beforehand (Fine&Manning:2000:44-48). As Goffman said, 'the self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location...it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited' (1959 in Wodak:2009:4).

Goffman's analysis oscillates between three metaphors - drama, ritual, and game - which draw attention to the interplay of manipulative and moral aspects of the social life. He portrays the self as simultaneously a product of dramatic performance, an object of social ritual, and a field of strategic gamesmanship. There are similarities between games and social encounters: both involve rules as to what aspects of the situation should be considered relevant and meaningful. Goffman combined dramaturgy with a game-theoretical perspective to explore 'strategic interaction' which involves the manipulation of information and assessment of action courses (Branaman:1997:lxv-lxxiii). He advocated a focus on the player, their moves, and the rules governing conduct, like Bourdieu, seeing the social life as a game and peoples' skill at playing it as variable (Calhoun:2000:282). Goffman reminds us a distinction between the player and the party is often easy to neglect, meaning distinctions are missed: players can play for others, be pawns sacrificed for the game, or tokens expressing a position. Players and their moves take place within games, or 'situated activity systems', which are governed by normative constraints (Fine&Manning:2000:48). Players strategically chart their performances and actions to be a viable member of a social order.

3.3.1.2 Order and Organisations

Goffman's work shows 'we are all performers in the interest of order' (Manning:2008:679). Lemert says the question of his life's work was: how does social reality sustain itself? (1997:xxxv). Performing in the interest of order is not the same as what an organisation requires in formal terms (Manning:2008:678). Goffman's interest was in orderly interaction which arises from a working consensus: order is 'the product of commitment to a shared set of expectations' (Samra-Fredericks&Bargiela-Chiappini:2008:658). Although the maintenance of social order is the primary goal, actors make game-like calculations in order to maximise their social esteem (Branaman:1997:lxiii).

Goffman states his report is meant to serve as a handbook 'from which social life can be studied, especially the kind of social life that is organised within the physical confines of a building' (1959:9). Organisations, as surrounding social systems, shape interactions 'because it places ecological, material, structural and cultural limits on choice. Constraint often produces response and resistance' and exploring these limits and how they are imposed is the core of his organizational analysis (Manning:2008:683). Bringing Goffman into the

study of organisations - as a scholar interested in 'the extraordinary organisation of the ordinary' - can add to our understanding of the foundations of organising (Branaman:1997:xlvi). He was interested in the ways organisations become meaningful to individuals as 'vehicles to which we assign our burdens' (Manning:2008:686). If 'organization' is accomplished by humans doing particular things, then the mundane has immense import because it intricately points to matters of order, trust, and reciprocity (Samra-Fredericks&Bargiela-Chiappini:2008:665), highly relevant to the study of the EP groups. Goffman's work urges us to explore rituals, routines, dramas, and games because organisations are built up and sustained by the performances of members (Van Maanen:2001:242).

3.3.2 Frontstage

Goffman extended the dramaturgical metaphor to the organisation of space, designating front and back regions to locations in which games are played. Performances are given frontstage by a team who construct a view for an audience but backstage they may knowingly contradict these impressions (Fine&Manning:2000:46). Front and backstages characterise all organisations with field specific implications (Wodak:2009:9,54, Wodak:1996).

The frontstage is 'where the performance takes place and the performers and the audience are present' (Wodak:2009:9). Decorations and fixtures 'tend to fix a kind of spell over it' even when a performance is not being given (Goffman:1959:110). A frontstage performance is an effort to give the appearance an individual 'maintains and embodies certain standards' (Goffman:1959:126). Successful performances require an appropriate setting: for politicians this means a podium, equipment, clothing and insignia, speech patterns, gestures, and other physical signals of their rank. An appropriate appearance and manner are required to appear credible (Wodak:2009:9-10, Goffman:1959:111). Frontstage political performances include; speeches, press conferences, debates, reports, interviews, websites, emails, and slogans (Wodak:2009:4). Many of MEPs' frontstage performances occur in Strasbourg, particularly voting and speeches. In June, informants told me I must go to Strasbourg to see the EP really come alive, hinting at spectacle.

There are increasing means to see what politicians are doing, including TV channels and blogs. However, these mediums enable politicians to perform and stage their work. They confront the public with ritualised official ‘snapshots’ such as visionary speeches, leaving transport, hand shaking, speaking briefly with prominent figures, and declaring promises or conclusions. Frontstage performances follow norms and national cultural traditions mean we learn what to expect (Wodak:2009:1-4,31,158). Performances are ritualised and rehearsed to ensure a credible ‘self’ is presented. Beyond this, we have little access to the backstage of the political field where necessary stress, crises, detailed negotiations, and mundane routines occur. Front region control means the public are excluded from many aspects of politics as a profession (Goffman:1959:137, Wodak:2009:4,32). We need to go backstage to investigate the everyday practice of politics. Goffman’s metaphor can help, from a scholar whose politics were not with a “P” but ‘an integral part of everyday life and human togetherness’ (Hviid Jacobsen:2010:12).

3.3.3 Backstage

The backstage is ‘where performers are present but the audience is not’ (Wodak:2009:10). Actors step out of character without fear of disrupting their performance and impressions are knowingly contradicted. Actors may step out of character as they cross into the physical back-region (Goffman:1959:114,123). Suppressed facts are discussed and access is tightly controlled by gatekeepers, backstage control being crucial for ‘exalted persons’ who cannot make a fitting appearance without retinue and ceremony (Goffman:1959:122). Communication out of character occurs and unofficial sentiments are expressed among teammates; e.g. treatment of the absent and collusion. Participants engage in protective impression management practices to defend their show. They exhibit dramaturgical loyalty, adhering to the moral obligation to protect their team’s secrets (Branaman:1997:lxvi). For Goffman, the axial distinction of any grouping is between the public and private; ‘a group that has something of a boundary around it, a gathering, small group, cluster, a little collection of people with mutual gaze and focus’ (Manning:2008:680). Within groups co-operating backstage to stage a performance, a more familiar tone for interaction is therefore set and informal names and language are used (Goffman:1959:127-9).

Frontstage performances are prepared backstage: ‘illusions and impressions are openly constructed’ (1959:114). Goffman emphasised the strategic planning of performances,

game-like calculations, and the control and manipulation of information to gain the upper hand in competitive interactions (Branaman:1997:lxiv). Preparation is required for MEPs to give credible performances to convince others and the control of information plays a central role. Everyday political work consists of convincing others by persuading and building alliances (Wodak:2009:46). Enormous preparation is required to influence decision-making and being well prepared means having relevant facts, prepared criticisms, interventions, and amendments to set the agenda, shape opinions, and draft documents according to political interests. The political profession consists of simultaneously complex and mundane activities (e.g. lobbying, negotiating, drafting, and revising) to leave one's mark, or traces of ideology, on legislation and other sites of struggle (Wodak:2009:75,35,114). The real work occurs backstage whilst frontstage performances are largely symbolic and these rituals exclude routines and chaotic aspects (Wodak:2009:127,187).

Brussels is the back-region in which the ritualised performances for Strasbourg are prepared. However, within this back region, committee and group plenary performances are prepared in committee *prep* and NPD meetings respectively, and information and strategies for these shows are prepared in the MEP office. As Goffman says, 'there are many regions which function at one time and in one sense as a front region and at another time and in another sense as a back region' (1959:127). Wodak acknowledges that 'back region is a relative concept: it exists only in relation to a specific audience and where two or more people are present, there will almost never be a true 'back region' (2009:11). She found that rather than just on the frontstage, politicians '*always* perform, more or less automatically and intentionally' and therefore analysis should distinguish between ritualised and codified frontstage performances and less formal performances with insiders as the audience (2009:153).

Despite being backstage from the public in Brussels, MEPs are then engaged in other role performances - such as loyal member of their NPD, group, committee, and professional field – and continue performing multiple roles to different audiences with different expectations. The parts actors play vary between the CoPs of which they are members, and they may change their 'footing' when moving between them to alter the alignment of their projected self; e.g. by changing posture, register, and content (Wodak:2009:78, Fine&Manning:2000:55). However Goffman notes actors 'tend to give the impression, or

tend not to contradict the impression, that the role they are playing at the time is their most important role and that the attributes claimed by or imputed to them are their most essential' (1959:136). The CoP concept next helps us to further understand how MEPs perform multiple roles in the backstage of this political field (Wodak:2009:11).

3.4 Communities of Practice

Behind the frontstage and unitary label of organisations are multiple co-existing CoPs. MEPs are members of multiple overlapping CoPs such as their NPD, group, and committee. They perform multiple roles and change masks as they move between them. Wodak found MEPs construct their identities in different ways depending on the CoPs to which they belong, and perform multiple roles consciously. MEPs belong to at least three value systems - individual, CoPs, and professional values - and this 'necessarily entails contradictions and loyalty dilemmas' (2009:77). Wodak observed an MEP 'construct his multiple identities in ever new ways, dependent on the specific context' over one day (2009:56,99,190). Proper scheduling of performances means audiences are separated but a few moments between are required for an actor to 'extricate oneself psychologically and physically' and change masks (Goffman:1959:138). We need to explore how MEPs perform multiple roles in this social space to understand how they negotiate conflicts.

The framework secondly draws on Wenger et al's (2002) communities of practice (CoP) concept. Once we delve backstage inside (large) organisations, we find co-existing CoPs and actors can be members of multiple communities. CoPs are collegial groups who share information on a regular basis to further a common domain. They support members and foster and develop expertise and socialise newcomers. Conceptualising the EP groups as CoPs can help us gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic interactions occurring between actors and these structures, their role, and subsequently how cohesion is achieved at the everyday level. The added value of this concept in the framework, as opposed to epistemic communities for example, is its focus on practice and the practice of knowledge exchange.

3.4.1 Definition

At their simplest, CoPs are collegial groups ‘who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion’ and deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an on-going basis (Wenger et al:2002:4-5). They don’t necessarily work together every day but meet regularly because they find value in interactions where they share information and advice. This value is not merely instrumental, ‘it also accrues in the personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each others’ perspectives’ and over time members develop a shared perspective, common knowledge, practices, relationships, and establish ways of interacting and a common sense of identity. CoPs foster the nature of knowledge and knowing as a living process rather than static body, as tacit and embodied as well as explicit, and as social and dynamic (Wenger et al:2002:1-21).

CoPs take many forms but structurally have three elements: 1) a domain of knowledge which defines a set of issues; 2) a community of people who care about furthering the domain; and 3) shared practice they develop to be effective in the domain. The domain creates common ground and a sense of identity, and membership implies a commitment to furthering it. The domain creates a sense of accountability to a body of knowledge and the development of practice. CoPs may be more or less explicit about what their domain includes, but members share an understanding of its purpose, resolved issues, and open questions. The domain guides the questions people ask and the way they organise their knowledge. It inspires members to participate and gives meaning to their actions. Knowing the boundaries and leading edge of the domain shows members what is worth sharing, how to present ideas, and what activities to pursue.

The community cares about and pursues the domain and fosters regular interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. They encourage a willingness to share ideas, expose ignorance, ask questions, and listen to colleagues. This is important because ‘learning is a matter of belonging as well as an intellectual process’ (Wenger et al:2002:29). Often a CoP is as much about surviving a work environment as about specific goals, and the community may try to preserve their identity more stringently than an organisation demands. Wenger says, ‘no matter what their official job description, they create practice to do what needs to be done’ (1998:6). Over time CoPs build a sense of common history and identity among heterogeneous members who take on roles, create styles and specialisms, develop reputations, and achieve status; ‘in other words, each member develops a unique individual identity in relation to the community’ (Wenger et al:2002:35). The success of a

CoP depends on the energy it develops itself and internal leadership. Whilst learning requires an atmosphere of openness and trust, effective CoPs are not necessarily without conflict.

Finally ‘practice’ is ‘a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents’ which members share. Practice is the specific knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains. It enables the community to proceed efficiently in the domain. It includes concrete objects and less tangible displays of competence: ‘it also embodies a certain way of behaving...in this sense, a practice is a sort of mini-culture that binds the community together’ and thus practice ‘directly affects the behaviours and abilities of members’ (2002:39,44). Once a CoP has been established for some time, members expect each other to have mastered the baseline knowledge which allows the community to work effectively. A community’s practice is a product of the past, but simultaneously is oriented to the future, providing resources to enable members to handle new and recurring situations (Wenger et al:2002:27-40, Wodak:2009:14).

CoPs have interests and incentive structures, and pursue their domain by sharing resources and engaging in collective efforts. By understanding their domain, practitioners recognise which issues will be interesting to other members and therefore raise and contribute relevant matters. CoPs interact regularly and share information and resources such as experiences, tools, and ways to address problems (Wodak:2009:14), as occurs in the EP groups to help MEPs cope and make decisions. MEPs learn and master their routines and codes to become a member and benefit from shared expertise (Wodak:2009:152).

3.4.2 Developing Expertise

CoPs provide points of connection in mobile and chaotic worlds and provide stability for professionals in organisations characterised by change and movement (Wenger et al:2002:xii,20). Organisations can come to depend on CoPs because of the expert knowledge fostered within them, particularly within large and technical organisations where members cannot have expertise in all areas. Participating in a CoP means members get help with immediate problems and spend less time hunting for information and solutions. By knowing their peers’ perspectives, members can make better decisions and devise better solutions, and perhaps take risks knowing there is a community behind them. Members

keep abreast of developments, thus accumulating their experience in a dynamic knowledge base. CoPs thus have tangible value, such as common standards and reduced costs, but also less tangible values such as cultivating a sense of trust, belonging, confidence, and identity (2002:15).

By fostering expert knowledge, CoPs can challenge traditional hierarchical structures (2002:33). This can occur within organisations where CoPs control expert information and its distribution. There can be something fundamentally unruly about a constellation of CoPs: 'they contribute to organisational complexity more than other approaches to knowledge because they create multiple centres of power based on knowledge. Less centrality of power entails more diversity and more stakeholders' involved (2002:158).

CoPs' expert knowledge, terminology, and practice can lead to exclusionary practices of non-members: 'as CoPs focus on their domains and deepen their expertise, they inevitably create boundaries' (2002:151). CoPs can hold others hostage to their expertise (2002:139). Regular interactions in CoPs means language and knowledge are often presupposed. For example Wodak observed (exclusionary) 'rapid-fire' exchanges between MEPs and their assistants (2009:121). The EP is a highly technical environment and therefore it is important we explore the role of CoPs and their expertise in individual MEPs' decision-making processes (Chapters 5-7).

3.4.3 Socialising Newcomers

CoPs also play a key role in socialising newcomers into the professional habitus. Rather than as an individual process with a distinct beginning and end, separated in a classroom, Wenger (1998) approaches learning as a fundamentally social phenomenon occurring in context. Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises and knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of enterprises. People in organisations contribute to goals by participating in practices. Learning therefore requires participation, 'a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities' and participating is a kind of action and form of belonging (Wenger:1998:4). In contrast to internalisation approaches, learning as increasing participation in CoPs concerns the whole person acting in the world, and requires a practice-based view of agency (Lave&Wenger:1991:49-50). Lave and Wenger distilled ethnographic studies of

apprenticeship and use the concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation' to broaden the traditional master/student connotation to one of changing participation and identity transformation within a CoP. They note CoPs have developmental cycles and 'reproduce themselves in such a way that the transformation of newcomers into old-timers becomes remarkably integral to the practice' (1991:122), as we see with the EP groups.

CoPs connect learning and performance in organisations. They 'connect the personal development and professional identities of practitioners to the strategy of the organisation', but if it is unclear how participation benefits members and they do not invest themselves, a community will not thrive (Wenger et al:2002:x,17). For example, an MEP may choose not to attend group meetings if they do not see it as useful to them. Wenger argues there is a 'profound' connection between identity and practice: identity is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities, and what roles and positions mean is worked out in practice. People are members of multiple CoPs and exist in a nexus of multi-memberships: past, future, and current; full and peripheral. Membership of any CoP is only part of our identity and we switch into others in different times and places (1998:158). At times however, these fragments may have to be reconciled (1998:149-163).

CoPs socialise newcomers. They mediate between the (professional) habitus and self, introducing individuals to expectations for performances which will be supported and validated within the status hierarchy. CoPs show newcomers the resources and attributes required for successful performances within the professional field, helping them to acquire the habitus. CoPs are therefore sites where identities are negotiated, constructed, and enacted. Each act of participation reflects the mutual constitution between individuals and collectivities, and how we understand our role is negotiated in practice when belonging to a CoP (1998:145-6). Roles are thus not monolithic, static, and fixed but multiple, social, and develop in context. They are shared and co-constituted in interaction, thus are constantly renewed, confirmed, or transformed. The habitus is performed and realised, but in specific ways by individuals (Wodak:2009:12-13,76-77).

Wodak found MEPs formulate their own interests and aims, and use the EP as a stage for their visions and goals which often relate to previous career experience (2009:89). As Calhoun says, participants have knowledge of the social life that is conditioned by their specific location and trajectory in it (2000:290). MEPs pursue their interests within various

CoPs, learning their codes and wearing different masks to perform different roles in each, in order to pursue their aims successfully. This approach is crucial to the exploration of socialisation in the EP: do MEPs become more pro-European, or, adapt to the field's habitus to pursue their aims more successfully? (Wodak:2009:63).

3.5 A Transnational Political Field

The framework has thirdly been informed by Bourdieu's (1990, 1977) work and Adler-Nissen's (2009, 2008) recent application of his thinking tools to the Council of Ministers. The framework conceptualises the EP as a transnational political field with a particular European habitus. This approach, like Goffman and Wenger's, sees structure and agency as inseparably related. It enables exploration of the habitus and doxa individual MEPs practice politics within, the everyday strategies they employ, and types of capital they accumulate - to give supported and thus successful performances in the EP's backstage CoPs from their position in the field. The groups as CoPs play a key role in mediating between the habitus and the self. This framework enables a nuanced understanding of the ways in which MEPs exert influence.

3.5.1 Structural Constructivism³¹

Structural Constructivism is an interdisciplinary approach which transcends the artificial division between structure and agency and allows us to explore how meaning is generated and has consequences in context (Calhoun:2000:286). It breaks with the presuppositions of structuralism, which disregard actors' capacity for creativity and intention, without relapsing into individualism, allowing space for both in analysis (Bourdieu:1990:61). It 'differs from the blind insight of participants without becoming the sovereign gaze of the impartial observer' (Barnard:1990:81).

This interpretivist account sees actors as constrained by material and symbolic structures and struggling to accumulate resources (Kauppi:2003:777-80). It assumes social reality is constructed in an on-going dynamic process and reproduced by people acting on their interpretations. Social meanings are generated around structures which come to have meaning for people which reflect an institution's social history and lead to particular

³¹ This term is taken from Adler-Nissen (2009) and Kauppi's (2003) application of Bourdieu's concepts to the EU.

structures of symbolic power which ‘provide strong situational logics of action’ but do not determine behaviour (Adler-Nissen:2009:82-86). Bourdieu describes the relationship between habitus and field as ‘the crucial aspect of this equation is *relationship between*, because neither habitus nor field has the capacity to unilaterally determine social action’ (Wacquant:2006 in Adler-Nissen:2009:85). Practice is central to this venture because it is simultaneously informed by a sense of agency but also that agency must be contextualised in relation to social structures of possibility and constraint. Taking practice seriously means we see society through a lens of what social actors are trying to do (Calhoun:2000:287).

A growing number of scholars are using Bourdieu’s tools to analyse the EU³² (Chapter 1). Adler-Nissen (2009) goes behind the diplomatic scenes and combines Bourdieu and Goffman’s concepts to challenge Legal scholars’ dominance of the opt-out field. Investigating marginalisation processes and the consequences of opting out for the position and practices of member-states, she presents the Council as a transnational field where the opt-outs are managed on a daily basis among a body of national representatives who share a particular habitus. In this field, an opt-out is experienced as a stigma which leads to stigma management strategies being pursued (2009:22-23). Structural Constructivism studies power and ‘the junction of personality, social structure and politics’ (2009:80) so is also a fruitful approach to the EP where members have continuously battled for powers (Priestley:2008). It is a fertile approach for exploring the implications of structures, because it enables the investigation of the historical and cultural context in which they gain meaning (Adler-Nissen:2009:82).

3.5.2 Field

‘Field’ is defined as ‘a structured system of social positions – occupied by either individuals or institutions – the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants’ (Jenkins:2002:85). Fields are ‘more or less structured spaces for action’ (Kauppi:2011:169). Thinking in terms of fields means thinking about social spaces so a specific, delimited space becomes the centre of analysis (Adler-Nissen:2009:88-90, Barnard:1990). Bourdieu identified the state as a field for analysis (Webb et al:2002:91) and analysed politics like any other area of social activity (Kauppi:2003:778). The EU field is ‘the concrete space of

³² Adler-Nissen notes there are surprisingly few studies given that Bourdieu wrote extensively about the civil service and was a critical observer of the EU (2008:668) but Georgakakis observes that political sociology of the EU is one of the rising trends in French political science (2010:112).

routine delegation where policies are built and political outputs constructed...understood as a space of relationships between agents who, from their institutional position or not, are competing for the definition of European institutions and policies' (Georgakakis:2010:113). Kauppi says the EU constitutes a kind of 'super-field' composed of smaller, relatively autonomous institutional fields (2011:154). Once we approach the EP as a space, we understand the institution as co-constructed and reproduced through action and routines rather than as a reified object (Wodak:2009:16).

Fields are thus sets of relations in the world. Practices mediate between the inside and outside of fields, showing who is a member (Wodak:2009:12,24). As well as a structured system of positions, the field is also 'a system of forces which exist between these positions' which relate to each other in dominance, subordination, and equivalence by the access positions have to the capital at stake (Jenkins:2002:85). What is at stake can help us delineate the often blurry boundaries of a field. Rather than static entities, fields are understood as shifting, dynamic, and fluid, and made up of interactions which are part of the game (Webb et al:2002:22, Thomson:2008). We can think of political behaviour in and through the field where stakes are defined and positions distributed and where a relatively autonomous struggle takes place. Approaching the EP as a transnational political field means we can explore it as a social system which follows its own logics (Adler-Nissen:2009:88-90). Adler-Nissen describes the field as 'a relatively autonomous social system consisting of a patterned set of practices and beliefs, which suggests competent action in conformity with rules and roles' (2009:87). Within a relatively autonomous site, certain behaviour is regarded as appropriate and more likely to lead to success and individuals develop 'a feel for the game' being played (Adler-Nissen:2009:90).

Bourdieu was drawn to the game metaphor to convey his sense of the social life; 'he meant the experience of being passionately involved in play, engaged in a struggle with others and with our own limits, over stakes to which we are (at least for the moment) deeply committed...we are constantly aware of being part of something larger – not just a team, but the game itself' (Calhoun:2000:275). The social life is a constant struggle which requires improvisation: a game cannot be understood only through its rules, grasping it requires having a sense of it and how to play it and an awareness of the whole field and other players. Bourdieu's actor is a strategic agent resembling a well-trained football player or mature painter whose practice requires incorporating a deep knowledge of the game into

economical gestures (Fowler:2011:321). Games are strategic and what makes for a good strategy is determined by the rules and one's own and opponents' strengths and weaknesses.

To understand a social situation, we must ask what game actors are playing, which means distinguishing different fields (Calhoun:2000:274-8). Many fields exist (e.g. education, economy, family, media) and each is divided into sub-fields. Social fields generate power relations and determine the resources actors have access to. Because the EU bestows authority, it is a field of power in which actors compete for influence and prestige (Merand:2011:178). Within a field, individuals compete for the capital which the stratification of the field is based upon and every field has a particular mix of capital (Adler-Nissen:2009:88-92).

3.5.3 Capital

An actor's position in the field and the types and amount of valid capital they possess enable them to (potentially) exert influence in the game being played (Webb et al:2002:23). Kauppi says 'resources' are any socially valued entities which can legitimately be used to influence outcomes in a field (2011:155). In functioning, the field creates belief in participants in the legitimacy and value of the capital at stake (Jenkins:2002:85). Capital is derived from resources which count as valid currency in the field; e.g. in the Council of Ministers member-state size, length of membership, and expertise can be exchanged into (diplomatic) capital (Adler-Nissen:2009). What counts as valid capital can shift over time, but the degree to which capital feeds into strategies and their success will depend on the hierarchies in the field.

Actors accumulate capital during interactions and performances which are credited by the social order. All fields have an unequal distribution of capital which is accepted by actors (Adler-Nissen:2009:99-101). Actors adjust their expectations in terms of implications imposed upon them by their position and background: they learn what they can reasonably expect (Webb et al:2002:23, Calhoun:2000:276). Individuals' amount of capital can change over time with their actions and strategies. Practice tends to reproduce structures and the social order because accumulation of capital enhances actors' ambition (Fowler:2001:321).

In the political field, actors accumulate, and fight for, political capital which ‘involves specific social skills, the capacity to mobilize individuals around a common goal, to formulate collective policies, or to win seats for one's party’ (Kauppi:2003:778). Bourdieu said ‘this supremely free-flowing capital can be conserved only at the cost of unceasing work, which is necessary both to accumulate credit and to avoid discredit’ (in Adler-Nissen:2009:100, 2008:670).

3.5.3.1 Three Types of Knowledge

When the EP is conceptualised as a political field, knowledge can be understood as a type of valid capital. Success in the political game depends not only on an MEP's position but also on ‘knowledge management’ because ‘much of what we perceive as disorder depends on inclusion in shared knowledge or exclusion from shared knowledge’ (Wodak:2009:16). Knowledge management guides actors and orders disorder as organisations are the site of power struggles for resources, including knowledge. Acquisition and (strategic) distribution of knowledge is fundamental to the everyday practice of politics.

Wodak identifies three types of knowledge linked in intricate ways to shape an MEP's ability to convince others (Wodak:2009:46). Firstly MEPs require ‘organisational knowledge’; shared knowledge about the institution. This includes rules, routines, and events and is required to function because without it MEPs are excluded from events and information. They need to know which ‘madam or messieur’ to ask for information, whether a room booking or rule of procedure (2009:189). MEPs must have knowledge of internal and inter-institutional procedures (particularly voting procedures), genres of legislation (directives, regulations, decisions, and opinions), drafting conventions, and the EU architecture and scope. Secondly ‘expert knowledge’ is required to pursue an agenda. In-depth knowledge of a policy field is required to credibly participate in debates and push an agenda because substantial knowledge is expected within EP CoPs where debates are often highly technical. Thirdly ‘political knowledge’ is required; know-how of the political game. Political knowledge is required to build alliances and advise others and refers to the tactics and skills required to do this. Wodak says politicians do ‘politics as usual’ in ‘very involved and engaged’ ways, drawing on these types of knowledge strategically to convince and persuade other actors of their position or vision (2009:46). The successful practice of politics intertwines these three types of knowledge (2009:45-9,71,89,101,127,119,153,191).

3.5.4 Strategies

MEPs acquire strategies to pursue agendas successfully and these create order in the initial apparent disorder inside the institution. Within the struggle for influence, actors use their position in the field and capital strategically. The key to understanding strategy is that actors want to achieve something but do so under conditions of uncertainty (Calhoun:2000:287, also see Krehbiel:1991). Strategies are the day-to-day tactics employed in the field (Adler-Nissen:2009:102). Exploring motivations behind strategies means we avoid passing off ‘the things of logic as the logic of things’ (Bourdieu:1990:61) making it a more useful concept than rules or norms. Within the logic of appropriateness tradition, action involves evoking an identity or role and matching the obligations of it to a specific situation (Jenson&Merand:2010:83).

Social action as a game, a locus of regularities, is played by players who have learnt strategies. Mastery of the game is acquired through experience which allows improvisation (Bourdieu:1990:60-5). Strategies come from actors’ experiences of the field, ‘their practical sense of logic’ (Jenkins:2002:70-2). This logic of practice implies that people are able to develop a feel for the game consciously and unconsciously (Adler-Nissen:2009:103). It is as a consequence of experiencing appropriate behaviour in the field that newcomers learn to operate effectively as ‘they anticipate the necessity immanent in the way of the world’ (Bourdieu:1990:11).

Adler-Nissen found for new Council diplomats, ‘intricate codes must be learnt, credibility needs to be built, and an understanding of how the other members of the club operate be developed’ (2009:102). She says norms and strategic behaviour are not opposites: agents are capable of reflecting on their own behaviour as they adapt to new or changing environments, and they can behave strategically in an environment where there is strong socialisation. However, they may not necessarily perceive consciously that they are behaving strategically, because fields generate their own habitus, an unarticulated *sens pratique*. The key to understanding this is that strategy is bound to the habitus (2009:102-4).

3.5.5 Habitus

The habitus is a socially acquired system of dispositions which is generated by the field and learnt by exposure and experience (Bourdieu:1990:60). It is a property of social agents, individuals or groups, and is a systematically ordered system of dispositions which generates perceptions (Maton:2008:51). Durable and practical, the habitus provides the rules of the game for everyday life and standards which individuals gain a sense of and operate within. Actors acquire the habitus through repetition and we 'know in our bodies, not just our minds' (Calhoun:2000:276). The power of the habitus 'derives from the thoughtlessness of habit' (Jenkins:2002:76) and is experienced in bodily terms (Calhoun:2000:292). Because it is conceived of as embodied dispositions rather than rules, the habitus allows for decisions and actions to vary across time and space (Bourdieu:1990:9, Webb et al:2002:41). The habitus is the embodied sensibility that makes structured improvisation possible in the game: it is where institutions and bodies meet (Calhoun:2000:292).

Bourdieu described a disposition as 'a way of being, a habitual state...a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination' (1977 in Maton:2008:51, Jenkins:2002:76). The habitus goes beyond explicit rules of a professional field and refers to 'conventionalised and internalised behaviour' and can be understood as aspects of culture 'that are anchored in the body or daily practices of individuals, groups, societies' (Wodak:2009:11). Habitus includes 'the totality of learned habits...that characterise a specific group' such as bodily skills, styles, and tastes. It is a set of habitualised social structures, geared towards field-specific objects of interest. The habitus is then an incorporated and stable strategy which directs the perceptions and actions of actors (Wodak:2009:11-12). Their strategies become typical of the field and presuppose certain skills and knowledge which gives rise to certain expertise which distinguishes one profession from another.

While field and capital provide an understanding of the structures of a social system, habitus is linked directly to practice and individuals (Adler-Nissen:2009:94). It is a key element of the reconciliation of structure and agency and attempts to answer how behaviour can be regulated without obedience to rules (Maton:2008:50). Bourdieu said the habitus functions like the materialisation of collective memory and is a disposition to act, perceive and think in a particular way in conformity with the field throughout time' (1994 in Adler-Nissen:2009:95). To be able to interact in everyday life, we need to acquire the rules of the particular game and this requires lengthy socialisation (Wodak:2009:11).

Fields generate a particular habitus and certain dispositions are appropriate, more likely to lead to influence, or are even required to function. MEPs acquire the habitus to perform credibly and successfully within the political field. Bourdieu's habitus, like Wenger et al's practice, is reproduced in the socialisation of newcomers (Webb et al:2002:36). Actors gain practical mastery of the game as they develop practical learning through participation (Calhoun:2000:289, Wodak:2009:113). However, the habitus is not necessarily coherent or harmonious because it reflects individuals' histories and can change over time (Adler-Nissen:2009:95) as actors reproduce and transform structures. Kauppi says every field has its dominant habitus, 'a culture or an internalized set of principles of actions and of evaluation. Reality is, of course, more complicated than this' (2003:778). Adler-Nissen suggests notions of norm-following should be placed into a particular field, where actors' understanding of goals is pieced together by the habitus and doxa, and the supply of options develops in response to the constraints of the field's particular history (2009:93).

3.5.6 Doxa

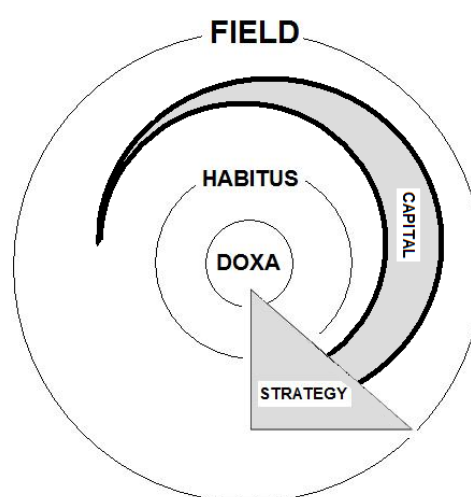
Fields demand preconscious adherence to their way of working (Calhoun:2000:291). As well as the habitus, fields have foundational rules which actors (often) do not reflect upon. The doxa is the taken-for-granted premise and fundamental truth which makes co-operation meaningful for actors within a (professional) field (Adler-Nissen:2009:97). It is the enshrined 'way to think' and can obscure the true range of possibilities: doxa is 'what we take not as beyond challenge but before any possible challenge' (in Calhoun:2000:285,291). In order for actors to recognise anything, they require the kind of orientation to action that doxa gives. Jenkins argues that because actors are an integral part of their circumstances and within them they acquire practical competence, they are incapable of perceiving social reality as 'anything other than the way things are, necessary to their own existence as *who* they are' (2002:70).

Adler-Nissen found the opt-outs are perceived as a breach of solidarity and threaten the *acquis communautaire*. She suggests that this attachment to the *acquis* is indicative of the Council's doxa where laws are not just regulative but play a constitutive role in the identity formation of actors because it signifies the meaning of European co-operation; and the opt-outs threaten this (2009:98-99). The doxa operates as if it were the objective truth, so

to identify it, researchers should ask questions actors themselves do not consider (Adler-Nissen:2009:97-99).

However Bourdieu questioned the premium research puts on natives' discursive explanations of their actions, because such an approach treats the social life as more of a matter of explicit rules than it is, and misses the ways in which practical activity is generated beyond explicit rules; e.g. marriage strategies and gift-giving are more strategic than peoples' self-understanding allows. However ethnography combines insider and outsider perspectives, and experience through immersion grants the researcher access to the doxa, or the un-spoken subjacent realm which is taken-for-granted (Calhoun:2000:280-1, Schatzberg:2008). Through ethnography we can explore the EP's doxa and how this shapes MEPs' practice of politics in this transnational political field.

Figure 3.1: Summary of Structural Constructivism



(Adapted from Adler-Nissen:2009:114).

3.6 Conclusions

3.6.1 Summary of the Framework

This chapter has laid out the iterative, interdisciplinary theoretical framework which is woven throughout this thesis. This framework and its approach to structure and agency allow us to explore the everyday practice of politics by dynamic MEPs and the role of the groups in their daily endeavour and the local meanings generated around these structures. The framework enables us to approach politics as an activity performed by dynamic actors in the backstage CoPs and spaces of this transnational political field.

The framework firstly draws on Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor and distinction between the front and backstage. This performative approach observes politicians change masks to give credible performances of 'the self' to different audiences. It assumes people try to give the best impression of themselves in interactions through impression management techniques. 'The self' is the product of social performances given which are constrained by the surrounding social system and images supported by the status hierarchy which require particular resources and attributes. The key to dramaturgical success is ensuring frontstage performances are perceived as 'given off' rather than 'given'. Frontstage performances are prepared and rehearsed backstage, and frontstage political performances are often ritualised. Interactions are more familiar backstage where the intensive, constant, and real work of politics as a profession occurs. Backstage, impressions are openly constructed and performances strategically planned, but backstage is a relative term.

The framework secondly draws on Wenger et al's CoP concept. Backstage inside (large) organisations we find co-existing CoPs. (Professional) CoPs are collegial groups consisting of a shared domain, community of people, and their shared practice. The domain creates a common ground and sense of identity and members meet regularly to share information to pursue the domain more effectively. CoPs are often about surviving the work environment and have their own interests and practice. They develop expertise and can create multiple centres of power based on knowledge. People are members of multiple CoPs and exist in a nexus of multi-memberships which sometimes have to be reconciled in practice. CoPs socialise newcomers. They play a key role when we view learning as a social phenomenon occurring in context, knowledge as a matter of competence in valued enterprises, and learning as participation. CoPs reproduce themselves thus in practice.

The framework thirdly draws on Bourdieu's thinking tools to conceptualise the EP as a transnational political field with a particular habitus in which the game of politics is played. This approach allows us to explore how meaning is generated around structures and has consequences in context. The field is a structured system of positions and power relations exist between them. Actors accumulate valid capital and employ strategies which come to characterise a professional field. Knowledge is a form of valid capital in the EP. The acquisition of political capital requires unceasing work. Capital is accumulated when credible performances are given in interactions. Fields develop a particular habitus of

appropriate dispositions which are required to function successfully. Actors acquire the habitus through exposure and experience as they develop a feel for the game. Fields also have a foundational doxa which actors do not question because it is fundamental to their social identity. To exert influence and play the game successfully, MEPs acquire the particular dispositions of the habitus, and strategically accumulate valid capital to negotiate the field's system of positions. The combination of these three elements into this framework has enabled me to study actors' dynamic interactions in this social context (Webb et al:2002:36).

3.6.2 Application of the Framework

Bringing these three elements together enables me to bring actors, agency, and social context into the study of MEP behaviour. It allows me to explore the attributes and resources required to give successful performances in this political field. As Adler-Nissen says, 'any attempt at modelling the world can be criticised for reducing complexity' (2009:113), but what the combination of intensive ethnographic fieldwork and this dynamic framework offers is a partial and situated but deeper, more nuanced, and more holistic understanding of everyday MEP behaviour in this social context. I explore activities and routines occurring in three backstage CoPs found to be important through fieldwork, and the everyday strategies individual MEPs employ in this transnational political field. This interpretivist approach produces a lively bricolage which conveys an in-depth understanding of MEP behaviour. The three elements bring us closer to the actors doing politics in Brussels and their perspective on doing politics as a social activity.

These three approaches integrate structure and agency (Fine&Manning:2000:56, Calhoun:2000:282). Goffman's performative approach explores ways performances are actively fashioned and given in the context of a surrounding social system. In CoPs and Wenger's participatory approach to learning, agents' strategically performed actions are embedded within social structures. CoPs socialise newcomers into their practice and in learning actors reproduce and transform structures (Lave&Wenger:1991:122). Bourdieu's Structural Constructivism also sees actors as dynamic figures adapting to and operating strategically within the habitus and field as they play the game with varying degrees of skill and success.

To clarify, the three elements are applied as follows. The thesis draws on Goffman's dramaturgical vocabulary and differentiates between front and backstage regions in Strasbourg and Brussels. The research approaches individual MEPs as actors preparing and rehearsing backstage to 'give' credible frontstage performances, as supported by the surrounding social system, to convince and persuade other actors of their position to exert influence in their areas of interest. It sees MEPs as actors performing multiple roles by changing masks according to the audience as they move between backstage CoPs (Chapters 4-5). The thesis draws on Wenger et al's CoP concept to explore the role of the NPD and group in individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics. They are conceptualised as CoPs, collegial groups which share information on a regular basis to further their common domain. They support members, develop expertise, and socialise newcomers. This provides a deeper understanding of the dynamic interactions occurring between actors and these structures, and, subsequently also, how cohesion is achieved (Chapters 5-7). Meanwhile the thesis draws on Bourdieu's thinking tools to conceptualise the EP as a transnational political field. This enables exploration of the habitus and doxa MEPs practice politics within, the everyday strategies they employ, and types of capital they accumulate (including knowledge) - to give supported and thus successful performances in the EP's backstage CoPs from their position in the field (Chapters 4 and 8).

Finally, to clarify, the framework is applied to the research question and issues as follows. It illuminates how individual MEPs practice politics at the everyday level inside the EP by approaching MEP behaviour as the performance of politics by actors in the backstage CoPs of this transnational political field. It addresses the research question by approaching and analysing politics as an activity performed on a daily basis by individuals within particular spaces. The framework is applied to the first research issue by conceptualising the groups as CoPs and exploring backstage routines occurring within them. The thesis explores the process of group voting list construction to further elucidate the role of the group in MEPs' everyday practice of politics. The framework is applied to the second issue by exploring how MEPs change masks to give different (credible) performances of 'the self' depending on the audience, as they move across different backstage CoPs, in pursuit of their interests. The framework is applied to the third issue by investigating the positions of this political field and exploring the habitus, doxa, types of valid capital available, and strategies employed by MEPs in pursuit of their interests. The framework is applied and

woven throughout this thesis to produce a dense bricolage which conveys a richer sense of MEP behaviour in this transnational political field.

Chapter 4:

‘The Brussels Bubble’: practicing politics in this transnational political field

‘Because it’s unique for parliament that it’s a consensus parliament, it develops its own culture. While in some ways that’s a good thing, we have to cooperate in Europe, there is no place in the world that you can learn it away from this parliament. This parliament is different, but the problem is when you develop your own culture that then moves, maybe too far away from substance and from how ordinary people think’
(Interview-42)

‘The rules of the game of Brussels policymaking are not all codified in law ... Many operate through informal processes that rely on cultural competence and symbolic capital, including mastering particular styles and habits of speech, dress, and bodily comportment’
(Shore in Mundell:14/10/2010).

4.1 The Brussels Bubble Floats to Strasbourg

For four days each month, MEPs and EP staff are treaty-bound to make the trek down to Strasbourg to perform the EP’s monthly voting rituals³³. Whilst most MEPs travel from their constituencies, assistants and officials take the *special* (chartered) Thalys or slower (public) *Doom Train*. Whilst standing on the platform one July morning, the dress-code of fellow travellers struck me. I stood among a sea of well-tailored suits, small wheeled suitcases, and access badges. These uniforms, clothing cosmopolitan men and women, many already on their smart phones, signalled their membership of this elite transnational group, these tastes demarcating them from the few non-members on the platform. Once aboard I, like most people, spotted a familiar face and travelled with an assistant from the MEP’s group, chatting about Brussels life. Hours later we arrived in Strasbourg where buses waited to ferry us to the EP’s complex. Meanwhile cars were transporting the MEPs from the station, airport, and hotels, this transnational tribe moving as a lanyard-and-suited wave through the city towards the chamber.

Plenary weeks consist of a ritualistic cycle of events and MEP and assistants’ movements follow regular rhythms in this Alsatian city. Most arrive Monday lunchtime and head directly to the Louise Weiss complex where they work long hours and attend evening events within the vast complex and its restaurants, or eat at a few nearby places people recommend. They rest in hotels recommended by the EP’s own travel office, booked months if not years in advance. At Thursday lunchtime, cars and chartered coaches return

³³ The financial and environmental costs of the dual seat are well documented (e.g. van Hulten:2011) but Hein contextualises it as part of the de-centralised, polycentric form of the capital of Europe (2004:161-4).

them to the airport and station. Their interaction with the city is spatially limited and its citizens minimal, meaning MEPs practice European politics in exclusive spaces.

Travelling to Strasbourg in July was an experience which brought me to conceptualise the EP as a transnational political field with a particular habitus in which politics is practiced. My time in Strasbourg drew my attention to the *Brussels bubble*, an ubiquitous phrase used by participants to describe life for those working in the EU institutions. Participants' isolation from the local population is exacerbated in Strasbourg. In plenary week the *Brussels bubble* – its habits, codes, and practices – floats down to Strasbourg and participants continue practicing 'politics as usual' within it. Exploring contextual factors reveals the everyday opportunities and constraints within which politicians practice politics, without which behaviour remains meaningless (Wodak:2009:7). Practices mediate between the inside and outside of fields to create in-groups (Wodak:2009:12), as the *bubble* metaphor highlights. This pervasive metaphor indicates a starting point for an ethnographic analysis. Approaching the EP as a distinct and relatively autonomous space enables us to explore individuals' everyday behaviour within it.

4.2 Introduction

This thesis explores the everyday practice of politics by MEPs inside the EP. Whilst the following three chapters explore activities and routines occurring in three key backstage CoPs, this chapter provides a broader introduction to the *Brussels bubble*: the physical, social, and cultural context in which the CoPs are embedded and EP politics is practiced. I argue that MEPs learn to play the political game and acquire the dispositions of the habitus to successfully exert influence in the field. The argument progresses as follows. The EP can be conceptualised as a relatively autonomous transnational political field and the habitus described as consensual, co-operative, inclusive, and egalitarian. MEPs learn to play the game and acquire the habitus to successfully shape EU legislation and EP politics. However, the habitus is not uniform and some MEPs do not acquire these particular dispositions and are playing different games. Approaching socialisation as the acquisition of the habitus enables us to take a fresh approach to this debate which also informs the literature on MEP behaviour more widely, and this chapter finds that the socialisation of MEPs takes time, happens informally, and relies on NPD and group colleagues. The key

role these CoPs play in MEPs' everyday practice of politics is explored throughout this thesis.

Regarding the research question, this chapter explores how MEPs learn to practice politics within this relatively autonomous transnational political field. Regarding the research issues, it focuses on the opportunities and constraints faced by MEPs in the context in which they practice politics. Regarding the theoretical framework, this chapter particularly explores the habitus. Section 1 explores the *Brussels bubble* as a relatively autonomous transnational space. Section 2 describes the habitus and Section 3 explores how MEPs learn to play the political game.

4.3 The Brussels Bubble: an elite transnational space

Brussels Airport greets visitors with signs saying “Welcome to Europe” (Figure 4.1), stressing its role as the ‘gateway’ to the capital of Europe (Brussels Airport). The EU institutions are clustered in a central slightly Eastern district of the city known as the European Quarter (Figure 4.2). Brussels-based colleagues recommended I live in the Quarter to get the full EU experience. But what is the EU experience, what is everyday life like, and how is ‘Europe’ experienced by those who work and perhaps live in this transnational space? This section explores the *Brussels bubble* as a distinct and relatively autonomous transnational space.

Figure 4.1: Welcome to Europe

[INSERT IMAGE HERE]

(Source: last accessed 21/12/2012, <http://www.brusselsairport.be/en/>)

Figure 4.2: Map of Brussels

[INSERT IMAGE HERE]

(Source: *Insight Guides*: 2009:i)

4.3.1 The Brussels Bubble: a local metaphor

The *Brussels Bubble* is a term frequently used by participants. It indicates a starting point for an ethnographic analysis by telling us something about how participants experience this

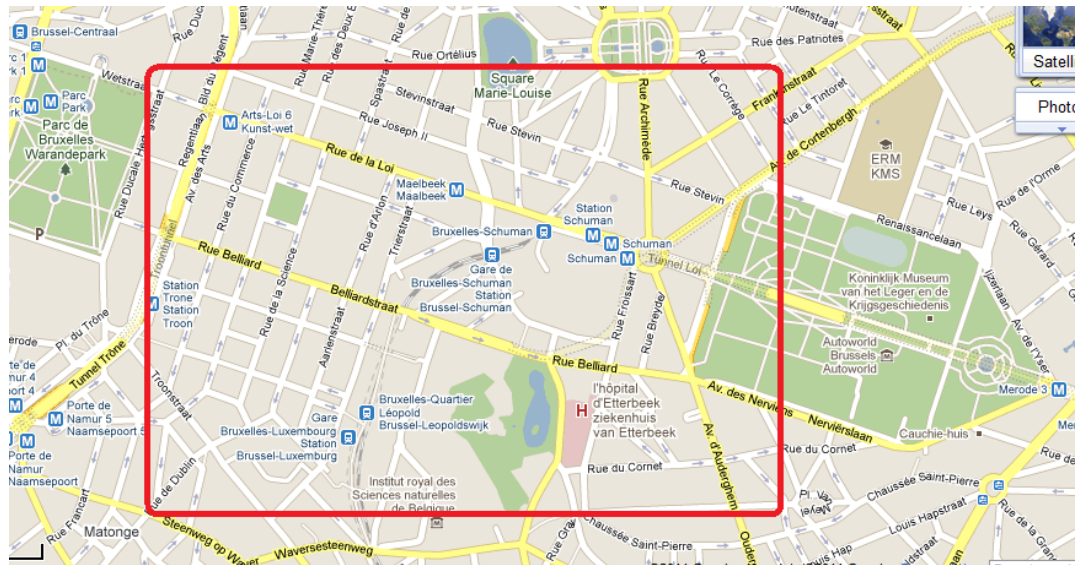
space and everyday life here. People recommended the European Quarter because it is convenient, but a bit pricey, soulless, and dead at the weekend - and that I would get the EU experience described thus. The metaphor refers to the peculiarities of working in Brussels: a small, multinational, multicultural, and multilingual space. It has a distinct rhythm to life and is characterised by constant movement with people coming and going, but can feel like a small village where everyone knows each other.

Those who come to influence the EP policy process are thrown together in this small physical and social space and must learn to navigate this complex social context. This metaphor is also used to express frustration: Brussels can be a claustrophobic experience. As well as exciting and cosmopolitan, the *bubble* feels like a small village where everyone goes to the same places and news travels fast. Because people often know no (or few) other people when they arrive, they primarily meet people through work and socialise afterwards. For MEPs who spend three days a week in Brussels, their time is packed and spent with colleagues and acquaintances in the *bubble*. The metaphor reveals a window through which to see how actors understand their context. It indicates that participants experience Brussels as bounded or enclosed. The European Quarter is a small geographical area where the institutions are clustered, and socially people often spend a lot of time with colleagues. The elite tastes and practices which create this transnational in-group simultaneously (physically and socially) segregate them from locals, as well as distancing them from EU citizens. However the term *bubble* also suggests a certain fragility to this enclosure.

4.3.2 The European Quarter

The *Brussels bubble* firstly refers to the small physical space in which European politics is practiced. The institutions are clustered between Trône, Leopold, and Schuman stations and adorn rue Belliard and rue de la Loi. Dotted around are Places which home cafes, bars, and restaurants where you can regularly find eurocrats meeting and socialising (e.g. Places Luxembourg, Jourdan, Flagey, Londres, and around Schuman). This clustering facilitates constant formal and informal interaction of European actors, but also segregates them. Hein says the EP was built with ‘a lack of regard’ for the social cohesion of the area which has experienced ‘bruxellisation’ since the 1960’s (2004:135-159, also King:16/2/2012, van Wunnik:1996).

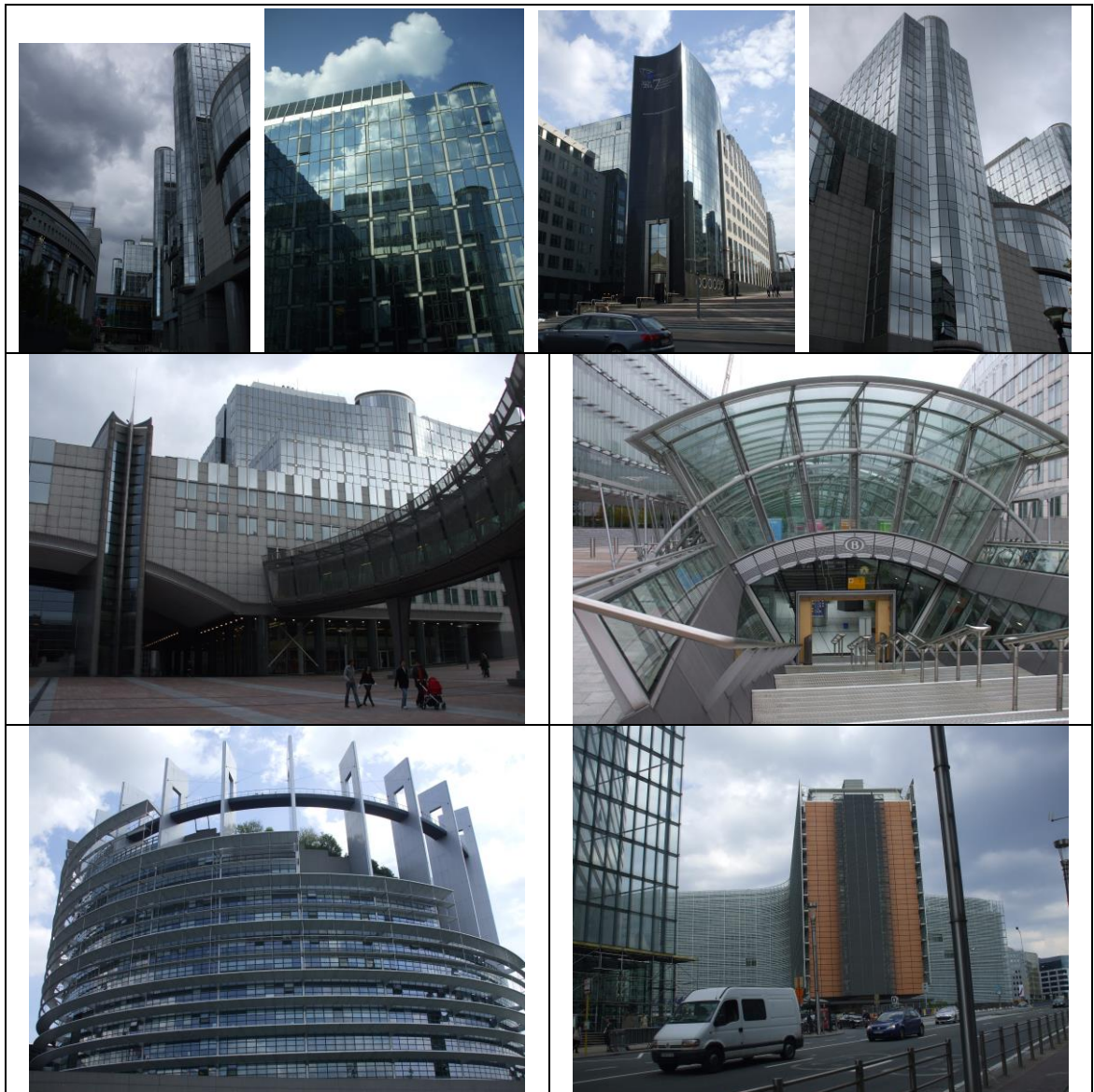
Figure 4.3: The Brussels Bubble



(Source: Map data ©2013 Google)

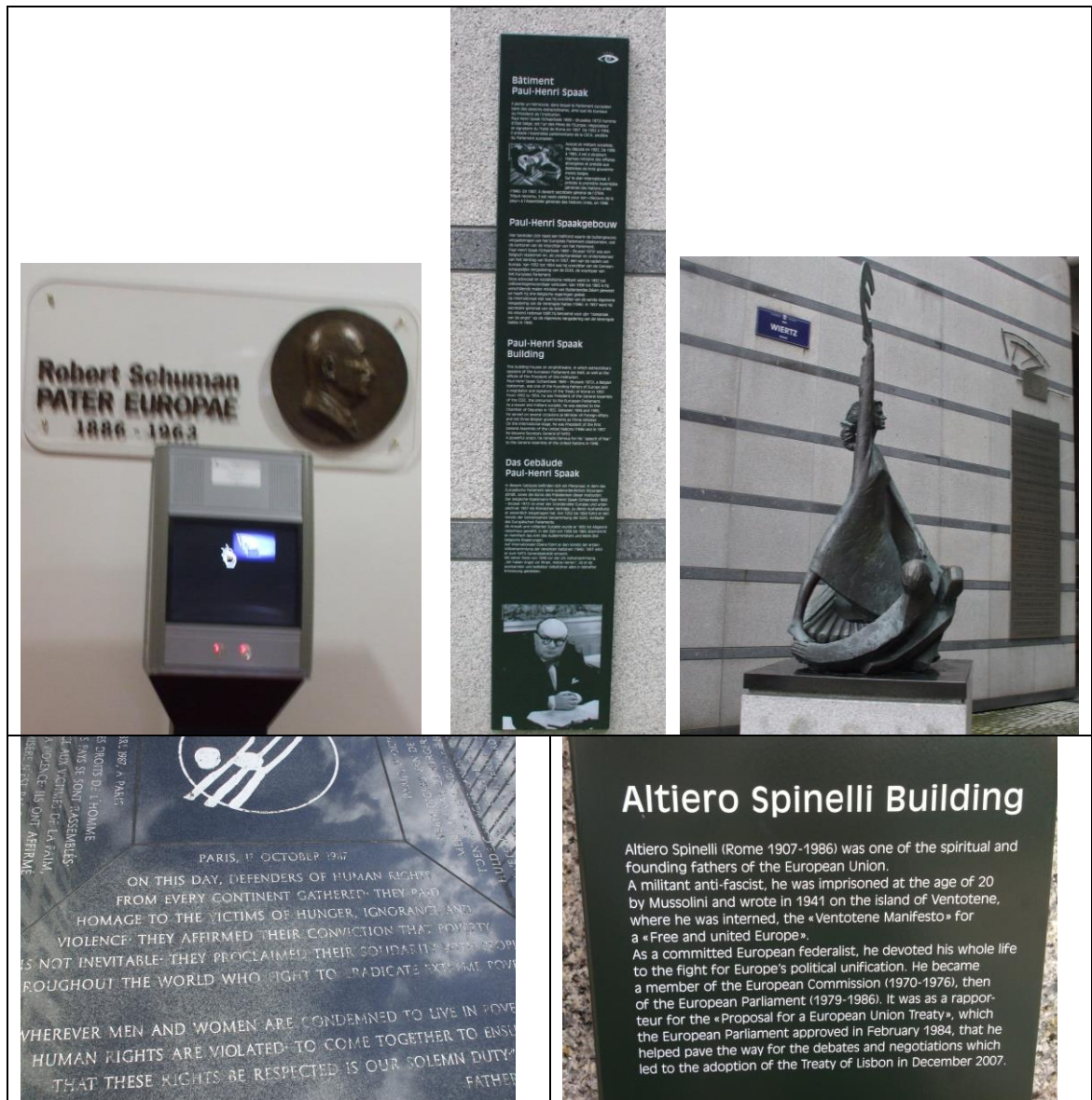
Buildings ‘express our values and aspirations, and provide one of the primary means by which we visualise ourselves and our society’ (Gelernter:1999:xviii). Wheeler describes the EP as feeling ‘a little like being on the set of a 1960s science fiction film. A slightly antiseptic vision of the future, in which mankind has moved on to a higher plane and all wars have ended’ (22/1/2009). The EP’s glass towers and encircling walkway give the impression of a futuristic city, heralding the future of politics. The EP’s Espace Léopold is the epitome of the distinctive architecture which characterises the European Quarter (Photos-1). Plaques provide historical information and commemorate events consistent with EU values such as democracy and human rights. The buildings’ names commemorate European figures such as Paul-Henri Spaak (PHS), Altiero Spinelli (ASP), Willy Brandt (WIB), Jozsef Antall (JAN), and Konrad Adenauer (Appendix-7). Flags are ubiquitous, the EU flag but also national and regional flags pronouncing their representation; everyone is here to represent something (Photos-2).

Photos 1:
Espace Léopold, Louis Weiss, and the European Quarter in Brussels



Photos 2:
Plaques and Artefacts around Espace Léopold (and Louis Weiss)

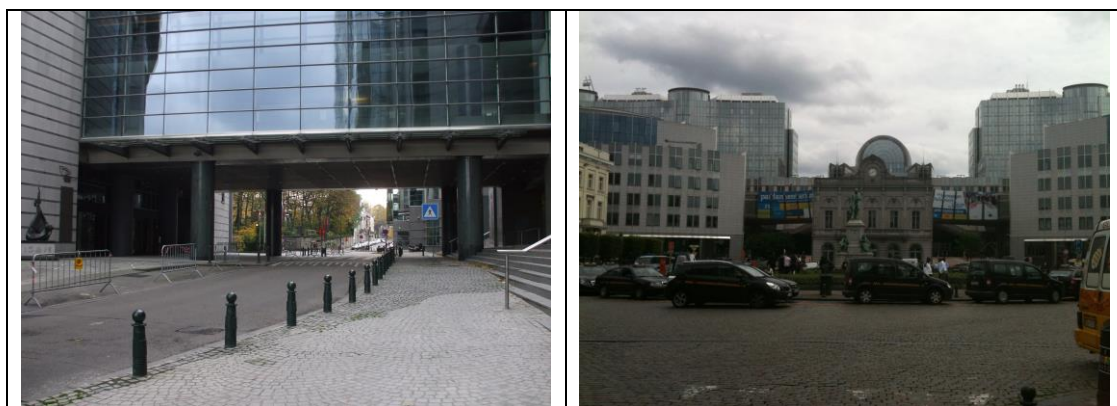




However the Quarter feels overwhelmingly grey. Shore says Anthony Sampson's criticism 'boring and bourgeois' is hauntingly familiar and calls it 'a soulless administration district' (2000:156). Following architectural anthropologist Rapoport, Hein says pragmatic organisations like the EU tend to produce a functional image (2004:170). The EP's buildings appear functional and unfamiliar. Unlike the recognisable fronts of Westminster, the White House, and Bundestag, there is no iconic image of the EP. Its front is obscured by a preserved building and the hemicycle is obscured by the administrative offices meaning the chamber 'appears as an annex ... rather than its centre' and 'the impression of a parliament in hiding' is reinforced by the principal entrance being in a minor street (Hein:2004:154, Photos-3). The building might appear unfamiliar, but for insiders, this transnational space is a complex social world which participants must learn to navigate.

Photos 3:

The Entrance and Front of Espace Léopold

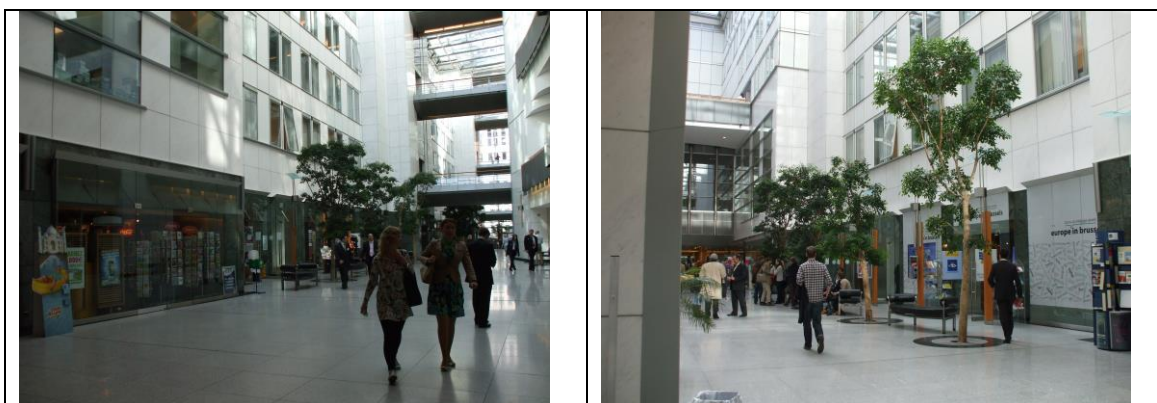


4.3.3 The Euro Village

The *Brussels bubble* secondly refers to the (small) social space in which European politics is practiced. The MEP's second assistant described Brussels as *like a total village*. The daily routines, habits, and codes of this group mediate the boundary of the field and membership is demarcated by elite practices and tastes (Wodak:2009:12).

Everyday life here is characterised by transience and movement. The EP has a high turnover of MEPs (over 50% were new in 2009) and assistants often stay less than two years (Corbett et al:2011:51,74). New faces are always learning the ropes and leaving parties occur frequently. Life for MEPs and their assistants follows a ritualistic annual and monthly cycle and weekly routine based on the constant movement of MEPs (Chapter 5). MEPs travelling between their constituencies, Brussels, and Strasbourg means movement is a constant motif, as Abélès (1993) and Wodak (2009) have described. The European Quarter contains everything participants need to function, such as hotels, apartments, international banks, convenience supermarkets, post offices, and bars and cafes, as well as being well served with transport links directly to the airport and stations. Espace Léopold itself also contains most of these facilities (and a supermarket, gym, and hairdressers), so MEPs do not need to leave the complex until they go home, via an EP car (Photos-4). This convenience reinforces their ghettoisation. Despite staff often living in and around the quarter, the tempo drops once the MEPs leave.

Photos 4:
Inside the EP (Ground floor conveniences)



During the week participants' lives are conducted within the Quarter. Professional and social lives blur in Brussels as evenings are often spent at events with colleagues and acquaintances in work attire. MEPs usually spend their evenings at dinners and events hosted inside Espace Léopold or nearby venues³⁴. MEPs and assistants are often the only or majority clientele of spaces they frequent, most notoriously around Place Lux (Banks:1/7/2011, Photos-5). Their routines reinforce their segregation. At weekends, assistants still tend to socialise together in a small selection of spaces. On a number of occasions assistants discussed where Belgians go in Brussels³⁵. The city and companies regularly host events (e.g. the jazz festival, White Night, marathons, and Christmas market) which groups of assistants and officials attend and parties are targeted at them by organisations such as Eurocrats and Euro Village (Appendix-5).

Photos 5:
Place Lux(embourg)



³⁴ External organisations have offices nearby or hire spaces knowing MEPs are then more likely to attend.

³⁵ Favell argues integration does not have to be with Belgians in this truly multi-cultural city (in Rozanska:2011:277).



As well as by their social habits, members can be identified by their dress-code. The way agents tend to incorporate into the habitus is demonstrated in the way the habitus produces agents' bodily hexis. The body is open, exposed, and capable of being 'shaped by the material and cultural conditions of existence in which it is placed' (Webb et al:2002:37). Dress-codes demarcate members in shared spaces (e.g. stations). The standard dress-code consists of functional office-wear; simple, well tailored, and under-stated, signalling professional tastes and relative affluence. It is often accompanied with a coat and wheellie-suitcase because of the constant movement characterising their lives. There is of course variation, not least between genders and seasons, and the MEP's former intern said the EP dress-code is more casual and varied than the Commission's. Inside the EP, dress-codes also signal rank. Officials and MEPs are smarter, although MEPs exhibit more diversity. Group staff, assistants, and interns are characterised by more casual clothing, often not including a full suit, and uniforms identify manual staff (e.g. security). However rank is more accurately indicated by the ever-present lanyard which signals members' access to this privileged space. The groups sometimes have their own neck-strings identifying members and an assistant joked that the press have yellow badges to alert you to their sting.

Figure 4.4: Badge Colours³⁶

Dark blue	MEPs
Aqua blue	Officials
Light blue	Assistants
Light blue + S	Stagiaires
Yellow	Press
Green	Local assistants
Brown	Lobbyists
Brown + VE	Visiting student
Red	Contractors
White	Temporary visitors

³⁶ This list was compiled through observation so may not be comprehensive.

Dress-codes in the EP also vary by time and transgression can highlight their presence. I wore a suit to my first assistants' meeting to find everyone was dressed casually. The chair eyed me suspiciously and asked who I was. On *Casual* or *Functionnaire Fridays* staff dress down, leave early, and may bring in children, relaxing their frontstage performances. Conforming to (dress)codes indicates your membership of a group as you embody its standards and values. Dress-codes also vary between nationalities and groups. A colleague said you can sit in the EP and guess the group or nationality of people walking by; the more left-wing groups display more casual attire whilst the centre groups are more business-like. However, perhaps more interestingly, despite subtle variation, styles have much in common, converging around the functional code outlined above. Actors share tastes as members of this elite transnational group.

Members also share other elite experiences and resources and Abélès says MEPs 'constitute a rather imprecise reflection of the population they represent' (1993:7). Sociological studies have revealed structural cleavages in institutional fields and have found that degrees from elite schools and ministerial experience are required for actors to reach the top of EU politics³⁷ (Kauppi:2011:161). Beauvallet and Michon (2010) characterise MEPs as 'a predominantly middle-aged, intellectual, partly internationalized, and feminized elite' (2010:148). Beyond national logics and multi-national heterogeneity, there are convergences in the modalities of MEPs' social and political recruitment. They have a middle-aged and middle-class profile (with a predominance of jurists, academics, scientists, and diplomats), are highly educated, and have an increasingly international profile with 12% obtaining a degree in another country. Beauvallet and Michon say MEPs' 'professional backgrounds tend to match those of the general political personnel' (2010:148). Egeberg et al (2011) found EP officials are middle aged, highly educated (70% holding Masters degrees) most often in law and social sciences, and a majority did all or part of their education outside of their home country (2011:11). EP actors can thus be characterised as middle class, well-educated professionals.

This transnational space also feels young, perhaps because it is teaming with interns and because some people return home after accumulating desired capital. Short-stayers

³⁷ Bourdieu's work stresses that societies consist of a series of differentiated social spaces distinguished by differences in lifestyles. His analysis of political 'representation' stresses that this field is 'professionalised and that political capital has historically tended to be concentrated in a few hands', the hands of those who occupy a distinct social position, and that politicians generate an esoteric culture of practices to produce and reproduce a specialised cultural world (Gledhill:1994:131-141).

accumulate capital such as contacts, knowledge, and experience then leave, whereas long-timers professionalise and move strategically in the field (Interviews-6,10, Rozanska:2011:6). As well as studying abroad participants are often well-travelled, a common conversation topic amongst this cosmopolitan elite. Conversations often begin with your *Brussels story*, telling how you got here, which often reiterates aspects of the social profile described. Telling these stories is part of the social life of the Euro Village where people network constantly, but also because it aids bonding in an unfamiliar and transient place where members have these tastes and experiences in common. An official said people have similar reasons for coming to Brussels, such as studying the EU, Erasmus, working for a political party or interest group at home, or being multi-lingual (Interview-6).

Many participants are multi-lingual and communication in the *bubble* is characterised by multi-lingualism (see Abélès et al:1993:32). A trip in an EP lift might mean hearing three or four languages spoken. MEPs can be seen striding around Espace Léopold being briefed in one language and calling greetings to colleagues in another. You may find yourself at a table where multiple languages are spoken and polyglots switch between groups. However, whilst the EP has 23 working languages (Corbett et al:2011:41), numerous interviewees said the unofficial working language is English, but ‘we all speak globish...we do not speak British English, we cannot speak the language of just one member state, especially one which criticises Europe the most’ (Interview-44). Participants often speak international English, a functional version without idioms and colloquialism. ‘De-caffeinated’ English, void of cultural complexity, is termed ‘globish’ by McCrum (2010) and ‘meets our practical need for a universal ‘other tongue’ - a simple, neutral, intelligible medium for cross-cultural communication’ (Cameron:5/6/2010).

Brussels’ globish features the frequent use of acronyms. Seeing my confusion about a committee acronym in June, a colleague said, *you’ll soon be speaking in acronyms like everyone*. Bourdieu and Wacquant see language as a form of social practice intrinsically linked to a group’s way of life (Everett:2002:67). Acronyms are used extensively in Brussels, everything from institutions, parties, and interest groups to procedures and buildings has one, and learning them is essential organisational knowledge. Acronyms are important for communicating quickly in a place where time feels short and nouns and names vary in different languages. The MEP’s first assistant said *EU-speak is a whole new language*. This

practice mediates the field boundary and actors acquire this vocabulary over time but it can make the field unfamiliar for outsiders³⁸.

4.3.4 The Golden Cage

The convenience of the European Quarter and actors' habits and codes segregate them at the everyday level from the local population in a 'golden cage' (Interview-6). The *bubble* metaphor acknowledges this ghettoisation but can also be understood to express frustration experienced by participants with the enclosure and their work-focused existence. Rozanska discusses the encapsulating role of networking and her informants said their social life was shrinking because of time limitations and fatigue (2011:275). The segregation is sometimes reinforced by myths. Midi Myths (referring to Gare du Midi) about dangerous areas and muggings are told as warnings to newcomers to avoid certain areas outside those regularly frequented. This is usually a concern for lower paid staff but after two MEPs were mugged in Parc Leopold in 2009 and 2010, former EP President Buzek asked for a security zone to be established around EU buildings (Brand:11/3/2010). These stories indicate a perception of fragility of their enclosure.

As discussed, anthropologists have explored ghettoisation and *engrenage* in Brussels (Chapter 2). The institutions are participants' principal social environment, providing information about where to live and what to do (Rozanska:2011:272). However the everyday practices described not only segregate MEPs and staff from the local population, but can also alienate other citizens from European politics as the institution seems distant and unfamiliar: 'why is the EP so much criticised outside? Because people think it is far away from citizens' (Interview-7). Ethnography enables 'close scrutiny of the concrete social representations and practices' that produce the democratic deficit (Kauppi:2011:168). Kauppi argues the growing autonomy and detachment of supranational executive networks and national political fields constraining the development of the European political field are contributing to the EP remaining a weakly valued institution (2011:169). MEPs particularly highlighted poor media coverage as creating distance between themselves and citizens:

'You can do very hard work and be completely unknown in your country ... When I was the rapporteur of the supervisory package ... it was very good work, we had a very strong

³⁸ Wheeler found EU terminology 'baffling' (22/1/2009).

majority it has been voted by quite everybody, 90%, ... because we had invested a lot of time and energy. We had some articles, but not a lot' (Interview-44)

'In 27 years ... on one occasion only has my vote been picked up by the media ... The problem is that MEPs operate in deep cover [...] the nub of that [story] is that what you do here is largely unseen by the public ... in the 1990's MEPs were invisible most of the time, coupled with occasional dramatic stories about expenses fiddles, meant the EP got a bad reputation' (Interview-48)

'Back home you are immediately accountable, the media will kill you if you vote out of line or whatever, here you can just do what you want because back home there is no interest in what you do ... it's a separate bubble where you do your own thing' (Interview-28).

Another MEP said they can become detached from their electorate 'not only because of the distance, it's because of the system, and because of this unique culture' (Interviewee-42): the habitus this political field has generated.

4.4 A Parliament of Backbenchers: a consensual habitus

The EP can be conceptualised as a relatively autonomous transnational political field with a particular habitus. The EU is 'a kind of superfield that is composed of a variety of smaller-scale, relatively autonomous fields of action' (Kauppi:2011:154). This chapter has so far explored participants' experience of everyday life in the *Brussels bubble*. This section now focuses on the EP as a field of action and explores the habitus MEPs operate within. The habitus is described by participants as consensual, co-operative, egalitarian, and inclusive, and the EP, by some, as *a parliament of backbenchers*.

4.4.1 A New Experience

Participants describe the EP's way of working as a new and unique experience which it takes time to gain a feel for:

'Culture, put it this way, the EP is totally different from any other parliament' (Interview-18)

'It's unique for parliament that it's a consensus parliament, it develops its own culture ... there is no place in the world that you can learn it away from this parliament' (Interview-42).

'It's the challenge we face, this is something new, it has never been done before' (Interview-44)

'It is another world, you cannot imagine it. No one explains it to you exactly, and even if they do, it's not the same as actually being here' (Interview-7).

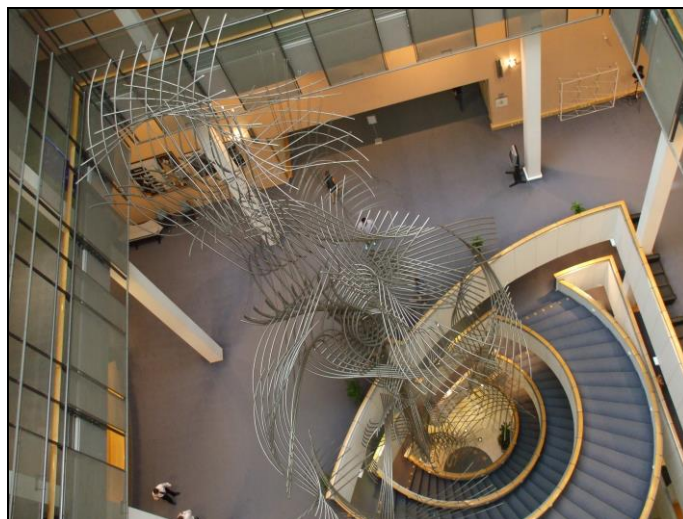
Some participants describe the EP as made up of multiple communities:

‘It’s circles within circles, each committee is a world of its own... I’ve been on the ENVI committee for nearly 12 years and its home ... That’s the first cultural thing you come across’ (Interview-41)

‘The difference that one feels is that of working within a multilingual, multinational and even to some extent a multicultural community, and the informal rules of social interaction which develop as a result ... I think it’s the interaction between people who celebrate each other’s cultures and try never to impose their own’ (Interview-18).

Outside the mini-plenary chamber in Brussels, Olivier Strebelle’s (1992) sculpture ‘Confluences’ celebrates the intertwining of cultures ‘as a symbol of the meeting and union of peoples, thrusting upwards just as the European ideal defies the limits of space and time, this hollow construction of shining steel plays on light and perspective offering a multitude of evocative dimensions’³⁹ (Figure 4.5 below). When asked to describe ways of working in the EP, interviewees sometimes said ‘*well it depends*’ and discussed how practices vary in co-existing backstage CoPs (e.g. committees, NPDs, and groups). The EP can be understood as consisting of individual strands weaving amongst one another but not merging, the resulting whole consisting of numerous parts⁴⁰. However dispositions emerged which tend to be performed across spaces and an MEP said a culture has evolved which is ‘more valuable than the sum of its parts’ (Interview-18).

Figure 4.5: “Confluences”



(Author's own photograph)

³⁹ A DG INLO administrator sent me pages from ‘A Town within a Town’, a brochure published by Société Espace Leopold, the constructor of the EP buildings (9/8/2010).

⁴⁰ Abélès et al say the Commission, with a sense of shared venture, is built on a ‘confluence of cultures’ (1993:69).

4.4.2 Consensual and Co-operative

The EP Rules of Procedure guide formal proceedings and in their frontstage performances MEPs 'stick very much to the procedures. Otherwise things that happen would be challenged' (Interview-18). The EP's complexity means procedures are more complicated than national parliaments' and 'you have to learn a lot about the procedures, because procedures are mother of this house' (Interview-43). However as an MEP elaborated, people interpret rules differently and even 'do not have the same perception about what rules are ... probably one of the most interesting issues in Europe now' (Interview-44). However a social game cannot be understood only through its rules, grasping it requires having a sense of how to play it. Within fields, individuals develop a feel for the game being played and what behaviour is more likely to lead to success (Calhoun:2000:274-8). Fields generate a habitus and certain dispositions are seen as appropriate or necessary to function (Webb et al:2002:36). All 18 MEPs described the EP's way of working as consensual and co-operative and the EP as an institution where members seek compromise:

'Day in day out we are working all the time on finding a consensus' (Interview-29)

'The whole spirit of the EP is more co-operative' (Interview-8)

'You can bring others on the track of your ideas, it's always about synergy' (Interview-43)

'There is a huge difference in terms of parliamentary culture ... Here you can reach a compromise. This is very important. It is true that you are not 100% satisfied, but at least 80% you will be satisfied with the compromise' (Interview-40)

'In this House the differences are huge, politically, culturally ... still this parliament succeeds every day in making core compromises between liberals and conservatives ... That reminds me why we are here' (Interview-42).

Consensual working emerged as the first principle, or disposition, of the habitus. The extent of this initially surprised some MEPs (Interviews-28,32,39,42,45,52) and they alluded to how it permeates every aspect of the practice of politics here. Even the EP's architecture encourages a consensual approach, which is important because 'buildings are so integral to our daily existence ... They structure how we move about, how we perform our tasks, and how we meet other people' (Gelernter:1999:xviii). The built environment directly influences the way people work in cities hosting EU headquarters (Hein:2004:1). Whilst in Britain, parliament is 'indelibly linked to two opposing rows of green benches and angry clashes across the despatch box' (Wheeler:22/2/2009), the EP's architecture encourages

co-operation: ‘the nature of the parliament, it’s not two sides. It’s almost as if the structure in the chamber in Westminster is confrontational and positional, whereas here to get anything done you have to work with other parties’ (Interview-29).

This is epitomised by the hemicycle where detailed speeches are given and adversarial speeches are the exception. MEPs sit alphabetically within their groups, starting with the GUE/NGL MEPs on the far-left fanning across to the EFD on the right (Appendix-6). MEPs speak from their seat rather than a podium meaning they face the chair who keeps order and face inwardly, speaking from the collective body. The groups blur and merge together and do not visually differentiate themselves as they could. This design is not only used for the frontstage. Many backstage spaces, used for group and committee meetings, are also designed this way (Photos-6). Buildings structure how we move and meet people. During events, committees, and group meetings the main debate is rarely the only discussion occurring. Meeting rooms have significant spaces around the edges and often outside them where small groups of MEPs and assistants gather informally. Sometimes it seemed those with formal speaking time were barely the main event as people walked around, in and out, chatted, annotated papers, or remained glued to smart phones. After a committee meeting, the chair encouraged informal discussions to continue over refreshments in the space outside (Photos-7).

Photos 6:
EP Hemicycles (Brussels and Strasbourg)





Photos 7:
Committee Meetings (and spaces outside)



Politics in the EP is ‘more fluid’ (Interviews-48,28) and this dynamic is facilitated by the physical environment. Espace Léopold consists of the PHS and ASP (WIB and JAN) buildings (Appendix-7). PHS houses the chamber and EP secretariat and ASP (WIB and JAN) house the MEPs’ offices and most of the meeting rooms. Floor 3, where most activity happens, consists of large open spaces, the vast walkways connecting these buildings (Konrad Adenauer and Konstantinos Karamanlis), and houses most of the cafes (Photos 8-9). MEPs meet informally in these spaces (as well as the strictly policed Members Bar and Restaurant) and may take the opportunity to do the lengthy walks back from meetings with colleagues (Belkacem:2013). One day the MEP asked us to stop and discuss the agenda when he spotted a colleague from another group near a walkway, until they were near enough to greet to start a conversation.

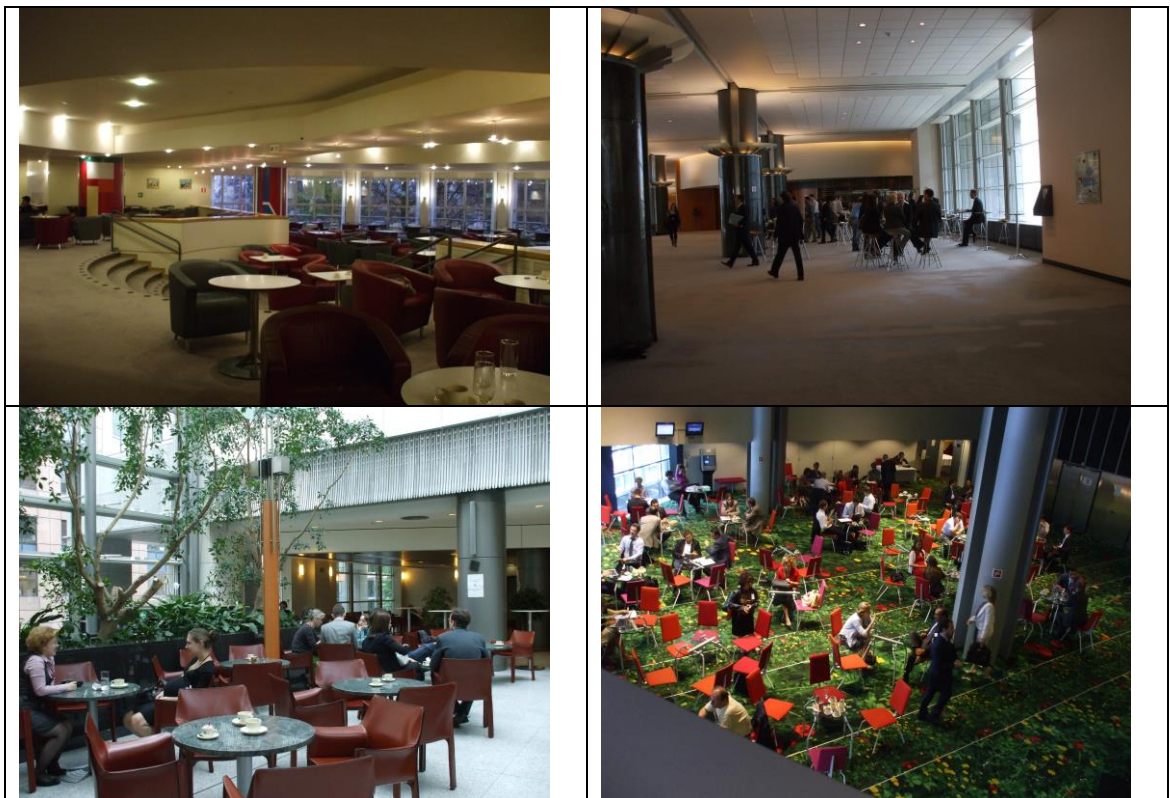
Photos 8:

Floor 3 (TV station, pigeon holes, Konstantinos Karamanlis walkway, corridor)



Photos 9:

EP Cafes: Mickey Mouse, Airport Bar, Floor 3 cafe, Flower Bar and Swan Bar (Strasbourg), and Brussels canteen





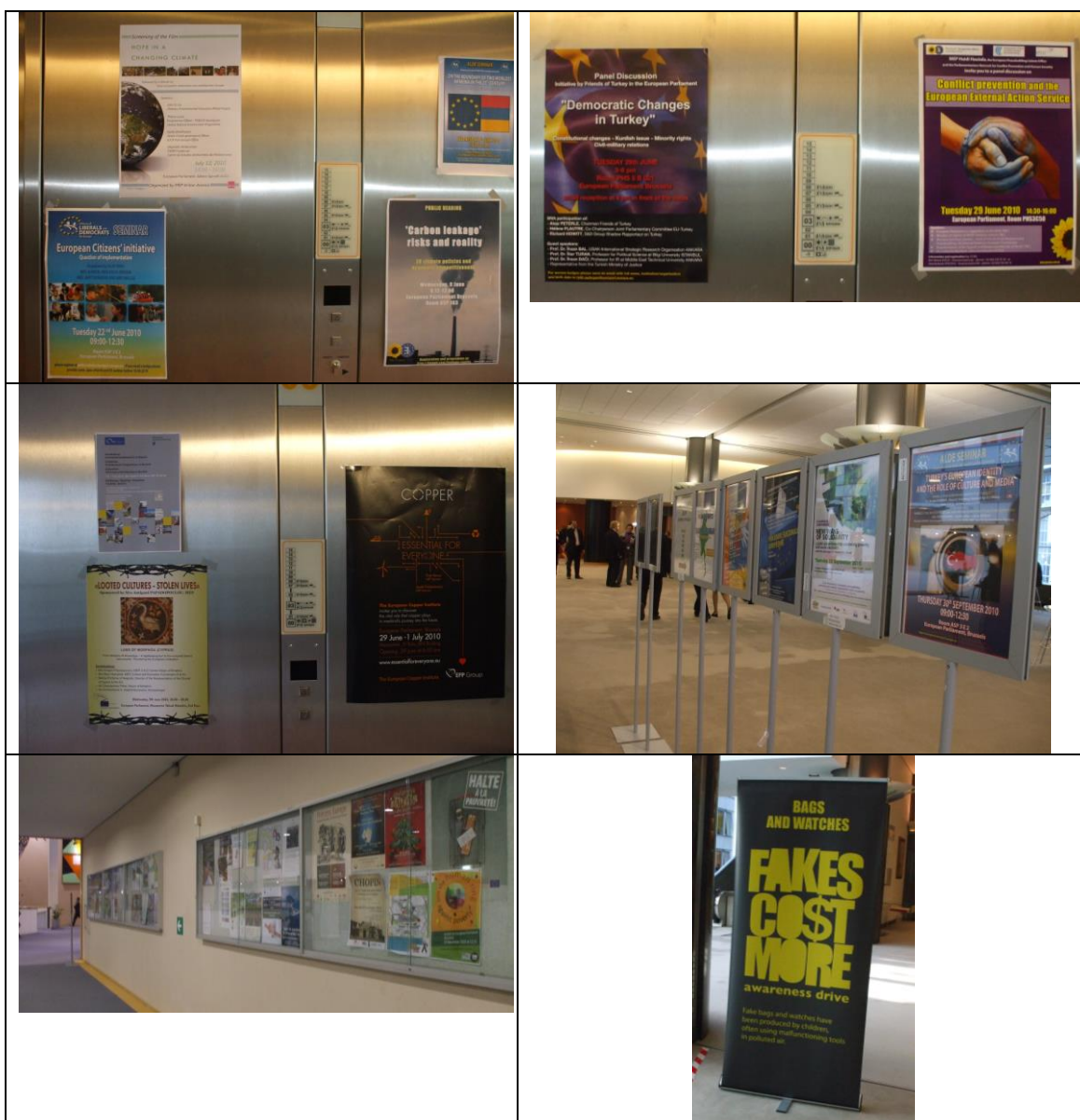
The large open spaces are used when MEPs are in Brussels for events and stands hosted by interest groups, groups, and rapporteurs to raise awareness about issues and reports (Photos 10-11). MEPs and staff interact informally and across groups and nationalities. As a former MEP's website says; 'much of the work which influences the final decision taken by the Parliament ... takes place at an informal level, outside the formal Committee meetings and plenary sessions' (Lucas). Belkacem's (2013) work on communication patterns finds that informal and face-to-face interaction is preferred by MEPs, these being important for building long term co-operative working relationships, which is facilitated by the building.

Photos 10: Events and stands in the EP





Photos 11: Posters for Events in the EP



The importance of compromise (often used interchangeably with consensus) in European integration is widely recognised but little systematic work on the concept and function of

compromise has been done (Reh:2012). We also know less about how it occurs at the everyday level. Interviewees discussed how a co-operative approach to colleagues is required to play the game successfully. The EP's shifting coalitions and more fluid politics requires a consensual and co-operative approach to politics and colleagues:

'If you work in a culture in which you strive for consensus, you need to learn not to be too edgy in the dealings with your colleagues from other groups ... while you disagree with a colleague today you may need their support tomorrow ... there is absolutely no point attacking each other on political fundamentals ... when we work on projects here that's not so much the issue, we have a particular problem to solve, we bring our dispositions and we see where we can agree, and try to limit the areas of disagreement in a systematic way ... there is mutual respect, a culture of co-operation and communication I find remarkable' (Interview-32)

'Press releases are not slagging off your opponents ... here you can criticize but the criticism is always much more muted ... Because the people you're attacking this week, are the ones you need voting for your proposal next week' (Interview-52)

'People always begin by thanking the rapporteurs ... They will always find something positive to say ... then they will say "however", and list the bits on which they disagree. They may disagree quite profoundly but it won't be couched in an aggressive and confrontational way' (Interview-29).

Displaying a co-operative disposition is particularly important for rapporteurs, shadows, and co-ordinators to successfully exert influence from their position in the field:

'Any sensible rapporteur has a meeting with the shadows to see if you can't consolidate and make some compromise amendments, really try and tease out where you can establish common ground, and where you do have some clear lines of disagreement ... you need to build on what you agree on' (Interview-29)

'There have been rapporteurs that just don't cooperate ... EPP rapporteurs in particular, and in the early days some socialist ones, 11 or 12 years ago. But now the socialists realise that they're not going to get their way unless they do deals, ... EPP/ECR, that's the minimum and ideally you don't want to because ideally you will try and build consensus anyway' (Interview-41)

'When you're doing a report, the first thing I do is get all the rapporteurs together ... we find out where they're going and we try to get some words from them ...with a lot of other things, we phone each other up individually and say, look I am doing this ...can we have your support?' (Interview-45)

'It depends on how many pieces of contention there are ... I was a shadow on a quite small ... Opinion ... We didn't need a shadows meeting really, because the rapporteur really took into account the amendments from the MEPs, including mine, and then produced compromises that were absolutely reasonable ... he did a really good job' (Interview-52)

'I had, many times, amendments made together with the other REGI coordinators. So it's also a matter of specific topics that bring us together, it doesn't matter which group you are' (Interview-40).

All the MEPs acknowledged a consensual and co-operative approach to politics in the EP, and some also raised concerns with this. Firstly, because EP politics is not adversarial, MEPs may not hear both sides which can be problematic for others if the rapporteur has only listened to certain interest groups (Interview-28). Secondly, compromise can produce bad texts because everyone wants to add something leading to ‘Christmas tree syndrome’ (Interview-44). One MEP was also disturbed by the lack of a coalition; ‘it’s an endless search of compromises, but the other way around this affects... citizens ... the lack of coalition is why people don’t understand what we are doing here and for what we are working’ (Interview-37). However most of the MEPs were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of this consensual, co-operative approach to politics (including Interviewees 28 and 44 overall), the opportunity it presents for individuals to exert influence, and the opportunities it offers individuals to be creative (Interview-43) and imaginative; ‘it’s about a collective effort ... trying to be a bit more imaginative... ducking and diving and trying to find the right bit of leverage to get the thing through’ (Interview-1).

4.4.3 Enabling: egalitarian and inclusive

The MEPs (and many staff) were positive about this approach to politics as opposed to a more confrontational and aggressive style which the MEP told a visitor is *just not how things are done here*. Interviewees usually drew comparison with their own or other national political cultures. Interviewees also explained how many participants experience the EP as an enabling environment:

‘The EP is more enabling ... it is about trying to get a productive outcome, whereas what you see in Westminster so much is the grandstanding and the set piece debates, the actual outcome of trying to change things is often secondary ... whereas you sense with the EP there really is a genuine desire to get an outcome ... around which a majority can mobilise ... I’m always struck by the word compromise, in the EP it’s not a sell-out, not something bad, it’s a very constructive way of trying to find common ground’ (Interview-1).

The institution and habitus are understood to enable individuals to exert influence. This is, firstly, because ‘there are more institutional ways of enabling you to function’ here than in some national parliaments and even non-attached (NI) MEPs (who do not belong to a political group) are part of the NI group which ‘gives you an institutional role’ (Interview-1) and access to rapporteurships, staff, and speaking time. This is because the D’Hondt procedure allocates offices and rapporteurships to all the groups proportionally (Interview-

50). The EP's potent committee and rapporteurship systems present opportunities for many individuals to shape legislation. Secondly, the EP's co-operative approach means opportunities for individuals to exert influence are widely dispersed.

'The committees are very strong and if you're a rapporteur you're in a very strong position as you write on behalf of the institution ... from the Conference of Presidents to the committees as such, to the single rapporteur, everybody has a certain degree of influence' (Interview-32)

'Maybe I can't change a whole report, but if I can manage to introduce something that will help the people in my constituency I am happy... it's up to us and our ability to convince and how much we are able to negotiate on amendments ... You don't succeed every time, but you have the chance to' (Interview-40)

'Here, even as an independent I can point to specific things that I have either influenced or helped to bring about. This is a significant thing to say, I couldn't have done in [member-state's] parliament' (Interview-27).

MEPs from more adversarial political cultures, notably UK MEPs, describe the EP as a place where 'nobodies' can exert influence as rapporteurs or shadows: you don't need to be a president, just collect your points and make a good case to your group (Interview-52). An MEP said the potency of the committees means 'this is a parliament of backbenchers' (Interview-48). Others alternatively claimed *everyone is in government* (Interview-3), a phrase also used by an MEP when he explained how the EP works to a visitors group in June. The lack of a permanent coalition and technical level MEPs work at means they see themselves as legislating rather than rubber-stamping (Interviews-52,28).

The EP's habitus is described by participants as inclusive and egalitarian. It is experienced as inclusive due to the wide dispersal of opportunities to exert influence (see Chapter 8) and the EP's co-operative approach. Participants describe the EP as egalitarian because all MEPs, regardless of any offices held, are paid equally (Interview-26) and because it is potentially possible for any MEP who works hard and acquires the appropriate disposition (see section 4.4.4 below) to obtain formal offices and exert influence over legislation in which they are interested. The term 'egalitarian' is therefore used by participants in the sense of the EP being an environment which offers equality of opportunity. However this is experienced by those who acquire the habitus, the appropriate disposition of this field. A further caveat should be noted. Two MEPs (Interviews 37 and 43) mentioned the structural disadvantage they face in the EP being from smaller member-states because they are less able to obtain formal offices and rapporteurships via the D'Hondt procedure which allocates these proportionately according to the size of the groups and NPDs:

‘... the fact that we are not in a good situation derives from some other instruments in the parliament like the D’Hondt system when we are talking about the distribution of duties, but for me this is a general handicap and distortion in this parliament. I don’t have a better recipe for a better functioning, but it’s definitely too mechanical ... [but] I personally am not suffering because of it. It is my view on the politics that if you are strong and have good ideas then you can be satisfied ... it is not a huge problem, but it is an institutional handicap actually’ (Interview-43).

4.4.4 An Appropriate Disposition

Within fields actors’ understanding of the goal is pieced together not only by external actors (e.g. national parties) but by the habitus and doxa which make some actions possible and others unthinkable. The habitus is socially acquired and dispositions incorporated into the bodies of agents (Maton:2008:51). Political professionals act in reference to other actors in the field, not just in response to parties and voters. The habitus is historically generated and ‘makes agents accept inequalities and hierarchies in society and take them as givens’ (Adler-Nissen:2009:94-6). Whilst interviewees described the EP as enabling and egalitarian, we must question whether this is the experience of other participants.

The habitus is perceived as enabling by and for those wanting to shape EU legislation and EP politics. These MEPs develop a feel for the game by acquiring and embodying the co-operative disposition in conformity with the field (Adler-Nissen:2009:118). An MEP described how an NI MEP was offered a report to ‘join in’ the life of their committee but took a confrontational approach to the shadows meeting and produced a report which said ‘no, no, out, out’ when ‘you’ve got to be logical and you’ve got to work within certain boundaries ... you have to work as its meant to be, a community working together’ (Interview-45).

MEPs develop a feel for the game as they acquire the habitus. Interviewees described three dispositions which are required to play the game successfully: being perceived as a *serious*, *co-operative*, *specialist*. Introduced here, this finding is elaborated in Chapter 8. Firstly, an MEP needs to be perceived to be taking the game of overseeing and shaping EU legislation *seriously*, as opposed to promoting an anti-integration agenda⁴¹, to be able to exert influence. An MEP described at length the importance of being well organised, efficient, and hardworking as part of this (Interview-54) and another described the respect among MEPs

⁴¹ Using Adler-Nissen’s framework, these MEPs might be said to be stigmatised (2009:104).

for hard-working colleagues from all groups (Interview-45). Even single MEPs can get ideas into legislation if they are active and participate regularly in discussions (Interviews-37,40) and are perceived to be a team player (Interviews-54,43). Secondly, as discussed, taking a *co-operative* approach to the practice of politics and colleagues enables individuals to influence reports and processes by building alliances (Interviews-32,40). Thirdly, the highly technical nature of EU legislation means MEPs possessing a reputation as a *specialist* are better able to convince non-expert colleagues (Interviews-54,1,32,18,42,43,40, Chapter 7). An MEP said:

‘having expertise, it doesn’t matter where you come from if you have that to offer, the other side of it is being a very good negotiator, ... this guy, is also very good at finding common ground, and negotiating and bringing people together, it’s not like an uncompromising view of saying well we think this and anything else is wrong, he’s very good at shifting everybody in a more progressive direction’ (Interview-1).

Playing the political game successfully requires building alliances to pass legislation through committee and plenary and depends on individuals’ performances of their self. As an MEP explained, ‘you should build this [specialist] reputation and, if you’re actually serious, if the quality of your work is ok, and is seen as such by colleagues, and if you get along with people, ... then you can be very effective and influence legislation’ (Interview-32). Because the *Brussels bubble* is experienced as a small village where everyone knows each other, it is important to build long-term relationships which depend on individuals’ approach to others:

‘Here you have personal factors which mean that the persons involved play a role ... people overestimate the consequences of nationality... the only thing that counts in daily life, is do you have someone in front of you that you can rely on?’ (Interview-44)

‘When you’re just a small group of shadow rapporteurs working on a report ... it’s difficult to find trends. It seems to come down to individual personality’ (Interview-41)

‘Making alliances with the other political groups is crucial, and again a lot of that is down to personal relationships and what kind of approach you take to them’ (Interview-1).

In a parliament where coalitions shift constantly, personal relationships are crucial to alliance building. As shown in Figure 4.6, when asked what makes a good MEP, over half of the survey respondents highlighted personality traits (also see Lord&Tamvaki:2013). Figure 4.7 unpacks the responses which were coded as ‘personality’ and illustrates that the assistants reported personality traits consistent with the dispositions described above and are again associated with a consensual, co-operative approach to politics. They suggested

that a good MEP is hardworking, passionate, and genuinely interested, and is also flexible, a good listener, and used terms related to being open-minded and a pragmatic negotiator.

Figure 4.6: Word-Cloud: What do you think makes a good MEP?



(Made using www.wordle.net)

Figure 4.7: Word-Cloud: Responses to Q14 coded as “Personality”



(Made using www.wordle.net)

Building alliances requires being approachable and a good communicator. In a multi-lingual context where informal working is part of the everyday practice of politics, language skills are vital:

'English is the lingua franca ... the rule is clear, that to be effective, to reach consensus, these agreements, you don't do this in large meetings with tonnes of people and 15 interpreters, ... you do this over a coffee or over a beer and then you have to work in a language which is not

your own, which limits the way you function ... for colleagues who don't bring decent language skills, at least in English, can make this house a very frustrating experience' (Interview-32).

Bourdieu said discursive choices are made according to the material or symbolic profit this yields, and this potential depends on an individuals' linguistic capital (in Everett:2002:68). The MEP said colleagues without English are unlikely to become co-ordinators but that it is also helpful to have other languages as some informal meetings take place in French or German⁴². A British MEP felt constrained by his language skills because cross-party working then 'can only go so far' (Interview-41). Another MEP said:

'deals are struck between a relatively small group of people on either side who know how to operate within the system. These will generally have been people who speak a number of different languages, who feel perfectly at home with each other's cultures, and understand where people are coming from' (Interview-18).

4.5 Learning to Practice Politics

In the EP deals are struck by a core group of MEPs whose lead non-expert MEPs follow (Chapters 7-8). This core group consists of those who know how to operate within the system – within this relatively autonomous field and its habitus. This section explores how MEPs learn to play the political game, by approaching socialisation as the acquisition of the habitus. The habitus is experienced as enabling by those wanting to shape EU legislation and EP politics. However, this is not necessarily the game all MEPs are playing.

4.5.1 Freedom to Play the Game

This chapter has so far argued that the EP can be understood as a relatively autonomous transnational political field which is segregated from citizens. The habitus is described as consensual, enabling, and a new experience which newcomers must learn to operate within. Participants described how MEPs have a lot of freedom in Brussels, to learn to play the game and pursue their interests. This political field and habitus present many opportunities for individual MEPs to influence legislation, particularly in the committees and groups. These opportunities are reinforced by the freedom offered by the relatively autonomous

⁴² Every meeting I attended without translators was in English including committee prep, inter-institutional, inter-groups, and events. However the MEP said some committees are dominated by Germans and if the three centre groups' co-ordinators are German they may conduct their meetings in German.

and distant nature of this political field from voters, parties, and the media⁴³ (see Chapter 1 and Whitaker:2011:21):

‘The separation of the debate from the vote ... for journalists makes it very difficult to follow and report on things’ (Interview-32)

‘When you come down here you live your life in Brussels or Strasbourg, the party at home doesn’t care about you...being in top politics at home, your interests about what is going on in this house is zero. Only when there are problems do you pay attention’ (Interview-42)

‘Our domestic political leadership has virtually no interest in what we’re doing. So we just try and make sure what we do is in accordance with party policy’ (Interview-41)

‘We actually go into the issues. Maybe it’s because it’s removed a level’ (Interview-52)

‘It’s a danger as an MEP that you flow on a European level and nothing else interests you’ (Interview-31).

The lack of routine attention paid to MEPs until there is a crisis means some perceive themselves to have a large degree of freedom to pursue their interests and shape EU legislation by acquiring the appropriate disposition and operating as co-operative specialists.

4.5.2 Playing Different Games

However this is not a strategy pursued by all MEPs. Not all MEPs acquire the co-operative disposition because not all MEPs are playing the same game and primarily aiming to shape EU legislation and EP politics. As Adler-Nissen says, the habitus is not necessarily harmonious (2009:95). Because it is conceived of as embodied dispositions rather than rules, it allows for actions to vary across time and space (Bourdieu:1990:9, Webb et al:2002:36-41). Some MEPs, most notably eurosceptic EFD and NI MEPs, take a more confrontational approach particularly in the plenary chamber. Perhaps the most infamous example was when Nigel Farage MEP attacked Herman van Rompuy as a ‘damp rag’ from a ‘non country’ which ‘shocked the normally consensual EP’ (EurActiv:25/2/2010). An MEP responded, ‘you do not play like this’ here (Interview-44).

UKIP MEPs have employed other strategies such as decorating their seats with Union Jack flags, staging walk outs, and wearing ‘Not allowed to speak’ banners outside of meetings to

⁴³ However interviewees suggested the degree of this varies between open and closed list systems and government and opposition parties (e.g. Interview-52).

gain media coverage (Corbett:2006, Interview-45). As Calhoun says, to understand a social situation, we must ask what game actors are playing and what their stakes are (2000:274-8). These MEPs can be understood to have different stakes and be playing a different game with a different goal: we might say they are playing cricket whilst other MEPs play football⁴⁴. They aim to promote an anti-integration agenda and therefore employ different strategies to achieve this. However these tactics mean they are not taken seriously and are sidelined from the game other actors are playing. Therefore they are not usually involved in the coalition building which passes legislation through committees and plenary. As Mérand says, in most fields relations between social groups are scripted and the rules of social interaction informal but it is tacitly understood that deviating can be costly (2011:177). These MEPs are sidelined because they do not conform to the habitus:

‘UKIP act as though they are in Westminster. It feels so embarrassing ... it’s because they don’t get it and still have that confrontational style’ (Interview-29)

‘If you are here just defending a new political position or your country, you’re dead. The people who really have influence ... are the ones capable of entering collective logic ... the Eurosceptics are very loud in their own country, but have no influence at all here. They do not enter into this political logic, they are always against, or always trying to block, they do not take part to gain’ (Interview-44)

‘The only ones I do not work well with ... are UKIP because they just don’t work ... we are there to do a job’ (Interview-45).

An MEP said that the UK Conservatives have managed to balance eurosceptic rhetoric at home with achieving their aims in Brussels: they ‘are some of the best operators within this place. They’ve been around for a long time and they know how it works. They make good on an anti-European accent at home for party purposes, but here they work the system’ (Interview-18)⁴⁵. Fieldwork having been conducted with a mainstream centre group means this study focuses on the practice of politics by MEPs taking part in the game of shaping EU legislation and EP politics.

⁴⁴ A Green MEP also described how her aims shape her strategies; ‘this is an opportunity to not only influence policies, but also to achieve some profile to demonstrate when the Greens are elected, are credible, authoritative, deliver the goods. So some of my objectives were to make sure I was a good constituency MEP’ (Interview-1).

⁴⁵ For more on the ECR and eurosceptic MEPs, see Brack:2012, Bale et al:2010, Hanley:2007, and Delwit et al:2004.

4.5.3 Learning to Play the Game

It takes time to learn to play the political game successfully. Scholars have investigated whether MEPs become more pro-European over time. It has long been a supposition that time spent in the EU institutions will lead actors to adopt their core values, principally a more pro-European outlook (Beyers:2010, Shore:2000). However recent empirical studies of MEPs' voting behaviour do not support this hypothesis (Scully:2005:5). Scully suggests MEPs get a lower dose of 'Europe' than assumed (2005:86) and others suggest the assumed experience MEP's have has been misconceived (Bailer&Schneider:2000). We need to rethink our approach to socialisation to be able to explore what the 'dose' of Europe MEPs receive consists of. As Kauppi says, not all MEPs become federalists but 'European political integration is also social and cultural integration. Spending time in Brussels changes the political habitus of politicians' (2003:785). Beauvallet and Michon agree the EP functions as a socialisation environment; 'MEPs can develop their knowledge and skills there, their beliefs, legitimate ways of operating that have progressively become necessary for those who wish to enter the institutional game, acquire its 'practical sense' (Bourdieu, 1998) and obtain the available 'trophies' (2010:161).

I approach socialisation as the acquisition of the habitus as actors learn to operate in the field and play the game. This reflects Scully's statement that MEPs are socialised as part of a learning process that facilitates goal achievement (2005:86). I asked the MEPs how they learnt to pursue their aims and interests here⁴⁶. All those asked said there was no or very little formal training provided and that MEPs learn on the job: 'it really is sink or swim, straight in there' (Interview-45). Some suggested it takes two years and others five to 'really develop a sense for what's going on behind the scenes' (Interview-32) and that firstly you have to learn your way around the labyrinthine building before you can even think about trying to influence proceedings (Interviews-18,32,27, Photos-12 below). Whilst some thought procedure training had been provided, none had attended it, and an MEP described how she did not know how to use the voting machine in her first plenary (Interview-52). Another MEP thought training on existing legislation by the committees would help them work more efficiently as few people arrive as EU legislation experts (Interview-27). A long-serving MEP said the groups are getting better at providing

⁴⁶ Coghill et al (2012) compare support in over 30 parliaments, finding parliamentarians are given little time to prepare and lack sufficient training, leaving them ill-prepared for their role.

seminars, and although more could be done, ‘fortunately most MEPs have a lot of initiative otherwise they wouldn’t be here’ (Interview-18).

Photos 12:

Signs around the buildings (Brussels and Strasbourg)



MEPs must also get to grips with the formal tools available to them: questions (written and oral to the Commission and Council) (Proksch&Slapin:2011), motions for resolutions, written declarations, speeches, and reports. These are perceived to vary in prestige. An MEP described how written declarations can be extremely important outside of the EU to the countries involved (Interview-18). However another declared them ‘essentially pointless’ because they do not initiate a legislative procedure or force an answer from the Executive, but ‘serve as fig leaves’ for constituents. He initially over-estimated their value and under-estimated the value of plenary speeches. Here the Commission and Council are present so it is an opportunity to influence the other branches, but also plenary proceedings are shown in the press room and often MEPs have the TVs on in their offices, so everyone hears you. Speech footage can also be uploaded to the internet for domestic audiences. This is often done with ‘One Minute Speeches’, a tool recently added for MEPs to raise topics of political importance. However he said this gives MEPs the opportunity to say ‘something that has no place in the EU political arena, but is important to the individual’ (Interview-32).

It takes time to learn to play the game and acquire the habitus. An MEP explained:

‘The most important thing is to understand the culture of the place. Where some MEPs fail is when they believe they can do this with other jobs ... or that they can swan in at the time when you have to vote, but not need to spend very much time here otherwise. It is certainly true that when you’ve been here a while you can decide with a rather greater degree of knowledge how best to use your time. But if you don’t throw yourself in to it at the beginning then you never really understand what it’s about’ (Interview-18).

A 2009 newcomer described how the EP can at first feel overwhelmingly complicated but that it is easy to 'get into' the working culture by being active and then you can be involved in reports and affect issues. She said, 'it's just important to get in the groups and committees to make the breakthrough with other groups and other MEPs. The focus is like peer pressure in some cases' (Interview-39). Meanwhile a long-serving MEP described how she had taken part in a French radio broadcast and 'the journalist was fascinated because ... you have not acted as French politicians, you have acted as MEPs. For a start you all listen to each other much more than if you were in France or Italy ... This is proof that we are all evolving' (Interview-44).

MEPs learn to perform the co-operative style on the job and some described how they were thrown in from the start to grasp the politics and personalities in their own groups:

'Learning how the politics works here, that was the most difficult bit. We did a resolution about agriculture in the first couple of weeks ... I don't know how I managed to escape unscathed, I think they might have taken pity on me because I was new... but that debate showed me where all the politics were and where the balance was, and who you had to make sure you'd picked off to make sure you had a majority' (Interview-28)

'When I was fairly new, I did a voting list on nuclear not realising that most people in ALDE ... were pro-nuclear. I did my little voting list and then had the embarrassment of having most ALDE people voting against me in the committee vote' (Interview-29).

MEPs learn through experience and by getting involved in their committees, groups, and NPDs, and by getting to know people and issues, and seeing legislation passed. By asking questions in committee and plenary and submitting amendments to draft legislation, they learn how the process works formally and informally (Interview-39,45). The next step can be to become a rapporteur for a report (a piece of draft legislation), although as a co-ordinator explained, many MEPs have to be a shadow rapporteur⁴⁷ a few times first to show they will take it *'sensibly'* (Interview-45) and new MEPs are usually given 'easy' reports first (Interview-52) - meaning less contentious or prestigious pieces of legislation.

From an organisational perspective, the extent to which institutions impinge upon peoples' pre-established mind-sets, depends on how they are organized (Egeberg:2002). Whilst MEPs learn on the job (applying previous political and professional experience), their NPD and group supports them through this process. New MEPs usually ask other members of their NPD or group and their staff first for advice on reports in which they do not

⁴⁷ See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.4 for definitions of these roles.

specialise (Interview-52). Likewise when I began the fieldwork internship the MEP's assistant told me to call the other NPD offices if I had any questions.

As is explored throughout this thesis, the groups can be conceptualised as CoPs: collegial groups who share a domain of interest and interact to further this on an on-going basis because they find value in their interactions (Wenger et al:2002:4). CoPs play a key role in socialising newcomers, mediating between the habitus and self, introducing individuals to expectations for performances which will be supported and validated within the status hierarchy. They show newcomers the resources and attributes required for successful performances in the field (Wodak:2009:12,76). Learning occurs in context and knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises, and knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of enterprises (Wenger:1998:4).

MEPs learn on the job. They learn how to play the game by participating in it, in their committees and groups. However, their NPD and group support them. Some NPDs set up more formal procedures; for example in 2009 one NPD set up a mentoring system pairing new and returning MEPs (Interview-32). An MEP who started part way through the term described how she arranged coffees with her co-ordinator and most members of her NPD to seek their advice on how to get the most out of her time (Interview-52). An NI MEP who was moving into one of the groups described how surprised she was when the co-ordinator and policy advisors wanted to meet with her to support her work, something she had not previously experienced (Interview-54). Some of the MEPs described how helpful it had been for them to have had an experienced assistant who knew how the institution works, particularly the complicated administrative procedures but also political codes and practices (Interviews-45,28,39,52). Most interviewees learned by getting involved in their committees and group and getting to know the politics and personalities. Co-ordinators aid this process in the way they allocate reports and duties. MEPs routinely attend meetings with their NPD and group where information and advice are routinely shared, as is described throughout this thesis (Chapters 5-7). In this way they learn to play the game and pursue their aims successfully in this relatively autonomous transnational political field and its habitus.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has guided us into and introduced the social context in which MEPs practice politics, and in which the CoPs explored in the next chapters are embedded. I have argued that MEPs learn to play the political game in this field to pursue their aims and interests successfully. This is a fruitful approach to socialisation because it is an actor-focused and context-sensitive approach which provides access to motivations and resources and thus presents a nuanced understanding of MEP behaviour in this transnational space. This chapter has argued the EP is a relatively autonomous transnational field with a consensual, co-operative, and enabling habitus. It is described thus by those aiming to influence EU legislation and EP politics, who learn to play the game, acquire the habitus, and accumulate valid capital.

The following findings have been presented. Firstly, the EP can be conceptualised as a distinct and relatively autonomous transnational political field. Elite tastes and practices as well as perceptions of a lack of media coverage segregate members from citizens. The institutions are clustered within a small area of the city which provides everything this mobile group needs to function. Their ghettoisation is reinforced by their routines, practices, and codes. Secondly, the habitus is described as consensual, co-operative, and egalitarian. A consensual approach is reinforced and facilitated by the architecture which encourages co-operation and informal face-to-face interaction. Co-operation and consensus are achieved in the manner in which actors approach each other in everyday interactions. To successfully pursue an aim or interest here requires actors to embody the appropriate disposition, meaning personality - or the presentation of the self - is key to success.

Alliances are made and deals struck within small groups of MEPs who have accumulated capital, learnt to play the game, and whose lead is followed by non-expert MEPs. However not all MEPs are primarily trying to influence EU legislation and EP politics, and particularly eurosceptic MEPs can be understood to be playing different games and therefore have different stakes and strategies. The segregation of MEPs in Brussels coupled with the EP's enabling culture means individuals have a high degree of freedom to pursue their aims in the *bubble* – if they learn to play the game. Whilst MEPs learn on the job and through experience and participation, they are supported and shown successful resources

and attributes and what performances will be supported here, by their NPD and group colleagues. The important role these CoPs play in supporting MEPs' everyday practice of politics is explored throughout the rest of this thesis.

Chapter 5:

The MEP Office: preparing convincing performances

‘People who want to make their mark have to find their niche ... Its only rarely out-riding leads to rewards in terms of propelling members forward. The routes up the ladder usually favour conventional approaches’
(Interview-35)

‘Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation ... We often find a division into back region, where the performance of a routine is prepared, and front region, where the performance is presented ... among members of the team we find that familiarity prevails, solidarity is likely to develop, and that secrets that could give the show away are shared’
(Goffman:1959:231).

5.1 A Meeting with Journalists

In October, the MEP met with some journalists to discuss The Lisbon Treaty and future of the EU. The meeting had been scheduled by the office and was conducted in a room on Floor 3. The MEP sat behind a desk facing about fifteen journalists who asked him questions after he had given a short speech. We had taken along flyers giving further information about some work he had done recently. However the MEP had not asked for preparatory information from the assistant because the topic was one on which he had spoken numerous times. He gave an opening speech which combined quotes and a metaphor I had heard many times by then, an account of his recent work, and his position on the topic with examples relevant to the interests of the journalists.

At the end they thanked him for his time and he shook some hands before striding towards the door. As it closed and we began the long walk back to the office, he bent down slightly and asked in a hushed tone, *do you think that went ok?* We discussed how we thought the journalists had reacted to his responses and how they might write it up. He explained that meetings with journalists are extremely important because they are a, somewhat rare, opportunity for MEPs to disseminate information about their activities and give their views on issues to the public. This is particularly important for the growing number of MEPs who see Europe as a *genuine career*. He said one of the biggest changes he has detected over the years is the way in which people perceive themselves here: the EP is no longer a place for *grazers and newbies* at the end and beginning of their careers, particularly now that Lisbon has created a system which people are largely happy to work with so MEPs can get on with politics rather than thinking about treaties.

Meetings with journalists are important because despite its empowerment, the EP has ‘a relatively low public profile’ (Scully:2007:175). They are a stage where performances of ‘the self’ are given and ‘the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited’ (Goffman:1959:245). Impression management techniques are employed by politicians to give credible performances, and the MEP was concerned as to how the journalists had perceived his performance which was ‘given’ to influence their understanding of this topic. Politicians’ frontstage performances are supported by appropriate settings, insignia, speech patterns, and gestures, and are prepared backstage. Once backstage, actors step out of character, often as they step into the back-region, by changing their ‘footing’ by changing posture, register, and content to alter the alignment of their projected self and begin discussing suppressed facts and communicating out of character – as occurred in this fieldwork moment (see pp.82-89).

Immersion in the field, observing an MEP’s performances and participating in backstage preparations, drew my attention to the performative nature of (EP) politics. MEPs prepare performances which are given to various audiences so they are perceived to be credible and thus persuasive. MEPs perform multiple roles by changing masks to give different performances of the ‘self’ in different co-existing backstage CoPs. It is important we explore backstage activities and routines because they affect MEPs’ ability to play the game successfully.

5.2 Introduction

This thesis explores MEPs’ everyday practice of politics by describing processes occurring in three backstage CoPs which were found to be key to MEPs’ daily endeavour. This chapter focuses on the MEP office. The chapter describes how performances are prepared and strategies planned in this space through mundane practices and daily routines. I argue that MEPs employ particular everyday strategies to cope with the particular work environment they face, including specialisation, re-contextualisation, and knowledge management.

The argument progresses as follows. This work-place is characterised by constant movement, shortage of time, information overload, technical information, and bureaucracy. MEPs’ time and activities are organised from the office to create order in this chaos. MEPs

consciously and unconsciously develop strategies to cope with this work environment. These include focusing on and specialising in a narrow range of highly technical issues which usually relate to their committee(s). I explore how specialisation is achieved at the everyday level. MEPs then ‘re-contextualise’ these issues as they move between backstage CoPs (Wodak:2009:152), changing masks according to the audience to give credible and thus persuasive performances in the pursuit of these interests. MEPs accumulate knowledge by employing trusted assistants, developing an information network, and regularly exchanging knowledge with trusted NPD and group colleagues who act as their *first port of call* in their non-specialist areas.

Regarding the research question, the MEP office is a site of political activity from which we can learn much about the everyday practice of politics by exploring activities and routines. The chapter explores how mundane office activities help to organise and prepare MEPs to give credible performances and how these routines can help us understand how MEPs negotiate their multiple roles. Regarding the research issues, the chapter focuses on how MEPs negotiate and perform multiple roles at the everyday level, and explores the everyday constraints they face. Regarding the theoretical framework, this chapter particularly explores the backstage preparation of frontstage performances, how masks are changed for different audiences, and the everyday strategies employed by actors in the habitus. Section 1 describes the work-context. Section 2 explores specialisation and re-contextualisation as coping strategies. Section 3 explores how MEPs accumulate knowledge, exploring the social web in which they are suspended and the role of the assistants, NPD, and group in MEPs’ everyday knowledge management practices.

5.3 The MEP Office

At first the EP can appear chaotic and feel overwhelming. An assistant described it as ‘this almighty machine chugging along’ and it can be difficult to understand what it does (Interview-2). Another assistant doesn’t always know what she has done each week but has always been busy (Interview-3). Whilst the MEPs are in Brussels, the reception is a noisy babble and movement constant: huddled visitor groups are ushered through security, MEPs stride purposefully through the gates, and staff rush to and fro with papers. MEPs move constantly between meetings, sometimes being briefed by assistants on the way. An official told me the best way to describe the EP is *organised chaos*. Abélès found ‘movement

is so constant that one sometimes loses sight of the purpose behind' it (1993:4). However immersion revealed latent order behind this chaos (Wodak:2009). Investigating what MEPs' time consists of and their routines provides a deeper understanding of behaviour and this profession as 'an appreciation of the extraordinary-in-the-ordinary may help to understand ambiguities' (Ybema et al:2009:1).

5.3.1 The Working Environment

5.3.1.1 Constant movement and shortage of time

When the MEP arrives in Brussels from his constituency on Monday lunchtimes, he usually heads directly to the office to discuss the schedule and collect briefings from and give instructions to his assistants. The work environment MEPs practice politics within is firstly characterised by constant movement and shortage of time. On the reverse side of the lanyards displaying members' access badges, is often a copy of the EP calendar (Appendix-8). This artefact is also found on the wall or desk of most offices. The calendar is constantly referred to by staff organising MEPs' time and activities and was one of the first things the assistant gave me when I arrived and was subsequently the first thing I gave the new assistant in October.

The calendar dictates what *week* it is: essential organisational knowledge for any actor hoping to influence the EP policy process. There are four *weeks*: Committee (pink), Group (blue), Plenary (red), and Constituency (green) weeks. Committee and group *weeks* are held in Brussels, plenary *weeks* in Strasbourg, and constituency *weeks* in constituencies, meaning there isn't any such thing as an MEP's average day (Interview-1). The EP working week is Monday to Thursday, Friday being reserved for constituency business. The structuring of time in this way and the EP's multiple work sites mean constant travelling is expected of MEPs. As well as between the constituency, Brussels, and Strasbourg, MEPs often also attend group *weeks* in other member-states, committee/delegation trips, and conferences⁴⁸.

Most MEPs arrive in Brussels (or Strasbourg) Monday lunchtime and usually depart Thursday lunchtime (Appendix-11). This constant travelling means they usually spend three days a week in the parliament. In 2010, they were timetabled to spend 154/365 days

⁴⁸ Whilst the media is quick to report on Strasbourg and travel expenses MEPs "enjoy", this was what many interviewees said they least enjoyed about the role and would change.

in Brussels and Strasbourg and therefore their time there is a *precious* commodity. MEPs and assistants often feel short of time and that there is never enough to do everything which leads to the rushing around also highlighted by Abélès (1993) and Wodak (2009). The MEP's time in Brussels often consists of a constant series of meetings, appointments, and events which can feel like a merry-go-round. It is within these limited spaces that MEPs play the political game⁴⁹.

This particular structuring of time means institutional life follows a distinct rhythm. Rushes of activity are associated with the MEPs' arrival and presence and the pace slows in their absence. Ebbs and flows are associated with the daily rhythm of preparation and briefings, meetings, lunches, more meetings and evening events. Weekly and monthly rhythms mirror MEPs' movements according to the calendar, and the EP's annual cycle is apparent throughout the *bubble* (e.g. plenaries and recess). Their arrival induces flurries of activity among staff and interest groups whilst the summer recess signals the *death* of the *bubble* as many leave the city, bars close, and the Quarter feels like a ghost town. The MEPs are thus the life-blood which enlivens the institution.

The calendar dictates where and when MEPs practice politics⁵⁰. Its structuring of time into the four *weeks* has another important impact on EP politics. This system formally institutionalises these four particular priorities, rather than any possible others. Time is formally allocated and meetings are organised for committee, group, plenary, and constituency activities. However time is not formally allocated for national groups to meet routinely. The calendar facilitates the performance of (these particular) multiple roles over the course of a month, rather than MEPs being confined to one. MEPs focus on the legislative function in committee *week*, and the representative function in group and constituency *weeks*: 'in some ways, the multiplicity of orientations of MEPs appears to be functional for the way in which the EP operates' (Wodak:2009:111). The calendar temporally enables MEPs to perform multiple roles, if they choose to. MEPs have a high degree of agency within this structuring of time to choose whether or not to attend the relevant meetings of any particular role. The calendar also dictates a particular ordering of the *weeks*: committee-group-plenary-constituency *week*. Plenary (red) Wednesdays and Thursdays (e.g. week 8, Appendix-8) indicate a mini-plenary in Brussels and committee and

⁴⁹ Wodak says being busy is characteristic of successful professionals and may be exaggerated frontstage (2009:114).

⁵⁰ Lobbyists know Tuesday and Wednesday evenings are the best times to get MEPs to attend (their) events.

group time is allocated beforehand in the usual order. This means that detailed legislative and political work is done backstage in Brussels before MEPs head to Strasbourg to give frontstage performances presenting the results of these negotiations and to take part in the monthly voting rituals which are the culmination of backstage struggles (see Chapter 7).

5.3.1.2 Information Overload

This workplace is also characterised by *information overload*. Even in his second term an MEP finds ‘the information overload is mind-boggling’ (Interview-32). After a particularly busy day the MEP declared, with papers and a smart-phone in hand, that he felt we were *suffering from information overload here*. The increase in the range of subjects of interest to parliamentarians means there has been a parallel increase in the quantity of information available and this problem is exacerbated by new formats where it is more difficult to determine the quality of information⁵¹ (Marcella et al:1999).

At first the number of emails, meeting requests, and volume of information the office receives seems overwhelming. The main sources of the *overload* are the email inbox and pigeon-holes. *Overload* comes from the variety, volume, and detail of the information. Appendix 9, listing the post received on two days, shows the wide variety of issues which land in MEPs’ offices. Reports, newsletters, magazines, and invites arrive daily providing information about nuclear power, green energy and human rights to pro-fur campaigns and baroque orchestras. Information comes from an array of sources including other MEPs, other EU institutions, constituents, inter-groups, and national and transnational interest groups.

The office also receives a high volume of information. Appendix 10 shows on Wednesdays in three different *weeks*, the office received on average 194 emails, 262 in plenary *week*. The most frequent types were invitations, from interest groups, about written declarations, and then were from the group and committee. Many actors vie for MEPs’ time and attention and try to supply them with information by sending it in various formats and inviting them to events. An assistant said the inbox can make you feel you are ‘drowning’ and is a ‘bind’ because someone always has to watch it in case something crucial is missed (Interview-3).

⁵¹ Wodak (1996) and Gigerenzer (2008) show this is the case in other (professional) fields.

5.3.1.3 *Technical and Bureaucratic*

The information the office receives is often detailed because of the highly technical nature of EU legislation. Marcella et al (1999) argue the need for accurate information has grown with the increasing complexity of government. MEPs highlighted the technical nature of the level they work at, often drawing comparisons with national politics:

‘National politics are dominated by politics rather than policy, whereas this place tends to be dominated by policy, and the detail that no one back home would get involved in ... that’s the nature of this beast, because you don’t have a government politics are less important’ (Interview-28)

‘The areas where we can really change something are those which are more technical– energy, environment, agriculture. Then of course nobody reads, or knows what we are doing because they are technical’ (Interview-42)

‘We are probably a little bit more ‘geeky’ and more technical in some respects, and less political. Certainly at committee level, because you are doing very technical political dossiers’ (Interview-52).

The level MEPs work at, particularly in committee, is technical and sometimes negotiations can concern deleting paragraphs or even changing words to alter meaning and make something more palatable to another group; e.g. deleting “directly”. Crafting amendments is a delicate job, particularly in a multi-lingual environment. An Italian assistant came to our office to discuss the definitions of words which needed to be used precisely in an amendment. As a former official explained:

‘Many of the issues don’t raise passions, I mean the precise wording we will require on a lot of legislation, you’re not miles apart to begin with because if the cleavage were so great, then probably you wouldn’t have got the legislation put before you by the Commission ... you accept that some action is needed and you’re arguing over the detail which can be terrifically important’ (Interview-35).

MEPs also pursue their interests within highly bureaucratic structures. Some MEPs noted their frustration with bureaucracy here, one describing her typical schedule and adding: ‘then there is time spent just trying to deal with the huge number of emails and just the huge administrative bureaucracy of it’ (Interview-1). A finance official told me you need the right form, signed by the right people, at the right time, and *then* things are simple here. In the office we joked that you need a signed form to get a door opened. Another MEP said, ‘I could argue the most important person is the one who looks after the buildings, because

sometimes the most difficult things to have done are new walls, or get new furniture. It's far more difficult than getting a new piece of legislation passed!' (Interview-18).

Daily interactions between the assistants and MEP often include exchanging forms to be signed and a common complaint among the NPD assistants is the difficulty of booking a room and other elements for an event and how long this takes. Assistants and officials help MEPs to negotiate EP bureaucracy, and committee officials described an important aspect of their job as ensuring the committee runs smoothly and that MEPs are aware of deadlines and procedures (Interviews-12,17,21,51).

5.3.2 The Organisation of Time

These characteristics mean organisational and expert knowledge are required to play the game successfully. MEPs employ strategies, consciously and unconsciously, to create order in this chaos (Wodak:2009:15-16) such as organising their time and activities to schedule and prepare credible performances within this professional habitus. It is important to understand the mundane activities and routines which occur in the office, and their tactical nature, because they contribute to an MEP's capacity to exert influence. Policy-makers' lives are quite routinized; they repeat activities and develop (automatic) strategies to cope with everyday problems and people follow norms 'more often than they calculate the consequences of their acts rationally' (Mérand:2011:176-182).

5.3.2.1 Assiduity

Lengthy and detailed work backstage produces the plenary votes which have received academic attention. Plenary consists of official positions being stated, but even the groups' meetings are pre-cooked to an extent (Interviews-6,47). Whilst some research has begun to explore committee and group processes, I found that some regions function sometimes as a front-region and at other times as a back-region (Goffman:1959:127). Performances are prepared for and 'given' to committee and group colleagues as part of MEPs' pursuit of their interests. As Bourdieu said, political capital can only be conserved at the cost of unceasing work to avoid discredit (in Adler-Nissen:2009:100). Interviewees described how constant (backstage) work is required to exert influence. You cannot just 'swan in' to vote (Interview-18) and:

‘If you’re interested in making an influence, assiduity is the most important quality and not to imagine that plenary weeks are necessarily the most important weeks. Any big subject going through is going to be treated over a period of time ... The real premium and a real link exists between time investment and the result ... If you are in the main groups and interested in having an influence then you’ve got to put in the hours’ (Interview-35).

Some MEPs live in Brussels because ‘committing yourself to success at Brussels also means devoting time to Brussels’ and then you can arrange meetings on Mondays and Fridays ‘to network more effectively’ (Interview-32). However others said it was possible for active MEPs to exert influence whilst maintaining a base at home, because there isn’t much happening on Mondays and Fridays but these MEPs must ‘plan times, not all of it spent in the committee room, because you really need to work with the secretariat, Commission officials, or with people from home, and outside bodies’⁵² (Interview-35).

5.3.2.2 Creating Order

Interviewees stressed the importance of MEPs’ planning their (*precious*) time efficiently:

‘You have to be really, really well organised. Extremely well organised. You have to work very efficiently ... efficiency is the key word not only here, but in the whole EP whether you belong to a group or not ... Either you want to do serious work or not’ (Interview-54).

MEPs create order by planning their time efficiently, even ruthlessly, and scheduling performances which (best) enable them to pursue their interests successfully, within the confines of the calendar. Whilst the MEP was in Brussels, often every 30 minutes were in demand and the diary was often scheduled to the 15-minute interval. One assistant described the diary as the *cornerstone* because if this does not function then nothing else can. This became apparent one day when a meeting over-ran and then others successively backed up until finally one had to be cancelled at the last minute, which does not appear professional.

MEPs’ activities follow the calendar’s monthly cycle. Describing her typical day, an MEP included attending committee meetings, giving speeches, voting, lunch seminars, presentations with experts or stakeholders, meeting lobbyists and NGOs, administrative issues, and group debates depending on the *week* (Interview-1), which reflected the MEP’s

⁵² Constituency activities vary depending on the electoral system and size of constituencies (Interview-35, see also Farrell & Scully:2007).

activities (Appendix-11). The activities MEPs routinely insert within the calendar confines constitute the political game⁵³. MEPs have a high degree of agency to pursue their chosen interests in the *bubble*. They choose which meetings to attend and plan others activities around these. In these spaces, they change masks and play different roles which they choose and which help them to pursue their interests. MEPs' routine activities often facilitate gathering and disseminating knowledge to persuade other actors of their position.

When the MEP arrives in Brussels, he collects the schedule and briefing material from the office and has often already been reading and preparing during his journey. The assistants often arrive early to check the diary, finalise briefings, begin answering emails, and work on reports, events, and on-going projects. The MEP's time in Brussels often then consists of a constant stream of scheduled meetings and events, punctuated with refreshment stops and returns to the office to brief and de-brief the assistants, sign papers, make calls, and work on reports - until he exits this merry-go-round on Thursday to engage with constituents or attend a conference (Appendix-11).

Official meetings are inserted into the diary first including committee, group, (mini) plenary votes, and meetings relating to any EP offices, then meetings which take place further backstage; e.g. committee *prep*, NPD, and Working Group meetings. The assistants then insert meetings the MEP attends regularly which relate to his interests; e.g. inter-group, europarty, and other working groups. Then travel arrangements are added and the MEP and assistants discuss if any meetings need to be covered in his absence. Then they are aware what time remains for events; work on reports and/or issues (e.g. with shadows, committee officials, policy advisors, or Commission officials); and other meetings with colleagues, group/EP officials, interest groups, experts, journalists, and constituents. Plenary *weeks* follow a similar routine but votes, speeches, key debates and events in the chamber, lengthy group meetings, interviews, and press conferences are also scheduled⁵⁴.

Many MEPs work long hours in Brussels and there are often so many actors vying for their time that meals are used for doing politics. MEPs may attend lunch seminars organised by rapporteurs/shadows, groups, or interest groups where information is disseminated alongside refreshments and experts are often invited to present on and/or debate salient

⁵³ What constitutes a typical day varies for MEP's holding offices such as group leader or committee chair.

⁵⁴ Green weeks are organised by the constituency office and consist of meetings with constituents and party officials, visits, interviews, and campaigning (Appendix-11).

topics. For example, the rapporteur for the report on illegal logging organised a lunch seminar with companies who import wood and deal with the forest directly (Interview-1). MEPs may alternatively eat in the EP's restaurants with a colleague or interest group and also attend evening events and dinners to continue gathering or disseminating knowledge (Photos 10-11).

Asked which of these routine activities are most important an MEP replied, 'they're all part of a process of bringing about change, you can't know in advance whether a meeting with an NGO is going to be more effective to that end, or a passionate speech in a committee, or meeting some other lobbyists ... it's an integrated process' (Interview-1). It takes time to gain a feel for the game but after a while MEPs learn how best to use their time here (Interview-18). When I arrived, the MEP briefed me on his interests which relate to his committee, delegation, EP office, and two other main interests. His time and activities and the work of the office were structured and focused by and upon these interests. When the new assistant arrived, the MEP gave us a template indicating how he wanted his week structured with time reserved for the pursuit of these interests. To play the game successfully, MEPs strategically organise their time and activities to focus on a few issues.

5.4 Coping Strategies: specialisation and re-contextualisation

Politicians acquire strategies to pursue their agenda 'more or less successfully' (Wodak:2009:15-16). MEPs consciously and unconsciously develop strategies to cope with their work environment, as they acquire the habitus and are integrated into the field of action (Kauppi:2011:154.) These strategies primarily include focusing on and specialising in a narrow range of often technical issues which usually relate to their committee(s), and organising their time tactically as described. This section explores how specialisation is achieved at the everyday level and how MEPs re-contextualise these interests.

5.4.1 Specialisation

MEPs working to leave their mark on EU legislation specialise in a few (technical) issues and it is these MEPs who move up the ladder (Interview-35) and are able to influence outcomes:

‘Almost without exception, the people who achieve the most here are those who specialise in and therefore become specialists in a very narrow range of issues. Those who are interested in lots of things and dabble in lots of things tend not to get to the heart of the matter. Those who specialise, are those who end up determining the shape of policy’ (Interview-18)

‘If you’re a regular member in a committee, and you build a reputation on a particular subject matter, one that is preferably not a one off but is something, like procurement, that is a particularly European thing...then you can influence legislation for 500-million people’ (Interview-32)

‘It is sometimes difficult to accept you are excluded somewhere, not able to see, to understand, to follow all the EP’s different initiatives. You have to make the choice and decide what is my core, my basic field of my engagement ... National parliamentarians come in on almost everything – take it apart, and function, and try to influence the conclusions; here it is quite impossible, you have to focus on where you have been located by your group, or yourself’ (Interview-43).

Maurer has said co-decision ‘condemns Members to become experts in highly technical’ issues (2007:10). Whilst expertise is not a new feature, nor exclusively relevant to co-decision, co-decision gives the EP ‘more room for manoeuvre’ when the EP and Council settle technical issues on an equal footing. Other scholars have highlighted specialisation and investigated whether it is linked to committee and reward allocation (Whitaker:2001, Høyland:2011, McElroy:2006a, Hausemer:2006, Bowler&Farrell:1995). Kauppi (2011, 2005) and Beauvallet and Michon (2010) have found endogenous specialisation is a resource required to reach the top of this political field.

5.4.1.1 How is specialisation achieved?

Ethnography allows us to explore the ways in which specialisation is achieved at the everyday level. Firstly, MEPs *focus* on a few issues rather than following all the EP’s initiatives:

‘There are issues that come across my desk that I would undoubtedly take up if I was on that committee ... but there are only so many hours in the day. So you compartmentalise. Strictly. Or drown’ (Interview-41)

‘Personally for me as Austrian, fisheries is not of that high importance, for example as budgetary or environmental issues like anti-nuclear power, so fisheries relies on two or three people and just from the discussions you understand who has the better experience’ (Interview-54).

Focus is facilitated by joining a committee/delegation you are interested in (see Whitaker:2001), following and getting involved in particular issues, and then being a shadow and/or rapporteur on relevant reports, and then perhaps trying to become a co-

ordinator or committee chair. This career trajectory was described by numerous MEPs and officials (particularly Interviews-18,28,32). A group official said committee allocations are decided by their Secretary-General and President as a ‘package deal’ based on MEPs’ requests and accounting for NPDs’ weights and members’ experience – new members being less likely to get their first choice (Interview-47). Interviewees said MEPs may request (and be allocated) committees based on previous experience (see Whitaker:2011 Chapters 4-5):

‘It’s useful if they used to be a farmer, and now they are in AGRI, its better but not necessary, not everyone needs to specialise before they come here, we have singers, astronauts, actors, models, scientists ... Usually you choose and the group co-ordinates depending on your background and interests...they try to do that so it’s easier for the MEPs to specialise and improve the discussion’ (Interview-7)

‘There are certain areas that I decided, right, I am going to do a bit of work here. One of them was volunteering, that’s my background. I was a teacher for most of my life, but I come from the community voluntary background’ (Interview-27).

Most interviewees were positive about this approach, however an Estonian MEP noted that it can be more difficult for (especially new) MEPs from smaller member-states because distribution (via the D’Hondt procedure) can appear to be more important than their (political) career and personal capacities (Interview-37). Another MEP insisted MEPs can build a reputation through their committee work, particularly if they (strategically) choose a recurring ‘European’ issue (Interview-32). An MEP noted that if you cannot get on to your preferred committee, you can alternatively pursue issues through working parties, inter-groups, and with interest groups and campaigns. She had worked in global public health and pursued this through a working party run by NGO’s including *Médecins Sans Frontières* (Interview-52). MEPs may also account for other players in the field; ‘I’m not intending to become a human rights champion because there is plenty of people doing that really well, and I don’t have enough experience, so that wouldn’t be the best use of my time’ (Interview-52).

Once MEPs have been allocated and identified issues on which to focus, they organise their time, activities, and office procedures to focus their efforts on these. The MEP’s second assistant repeatedly told actors contacting the MEP about other issues that the office did not work in that field and that they should contact someone else in the NPD or group (unless it was a constituent). To explore how specialisation is achieved, we firstly return to the calendar. The particular ordering of the *weeks* (committee-group-plenary)

means MEPs acquire ‘expert knowledge’ and develop (endogenous) specialisation during committee *weeks* and then harness this to give convincing performances for committee members and then group colleagues in group and plenary *weeks*, to influence committee proceedings, group voting lists, and votes (Chapter 7). Whilst knowledge is constantly acquired and disseminated, acquisition tends to be concentrated in committee *weeks*.

The MEP acquires expert knowledge through the activities he engages in (particularly) during committee *weeks* (Appendix-11). He attends committee/delegation meetings, takes part in debates and discussions, and listens to relevant experts the committee (secretariat) invites. He also attends committee *prep* meetings with group colleagues where they discuss reports and the group line. Specialisation is achieved through committee-related activities and MEPs’ pursuit of their interests through these structures. Committees are ‘crucial’ because ‘that’s where all the detailed work goes on’ (Interview-3) and it is where links are established on issues between different groups (Interview-34). Through their committee work, (active) MEPs gather knowledge, become (known as) experts, and can develop a specialist reputation which enables them to exert influence in backstage processes and over outcomes:

‘I made sure I got on the committee where my interest lies. You then have to get yourself in some sort of position to be able to do stuff. I became the coordinator which gives you some sort of power and I was very lucky with the allocation of reports. We managed to carve a deal out which gave me the first report on CAP which is a big issue for me to pursue and gave me a huge profile’ (Interview-28)

‘...the most important thing is how active you have been. If you haven’t been to the meetings, prep meetings, if you haven’t been studying reports, it is quite impossible to get your own reports if you haven’t been active’ (Interview-39).

Three caveats should be noted. Firstly, MEPs can (formally) attend any committee and submit amendments: ‘at committee level, it is very difficult to keep control of the members, they can do what they like. They are a free agent, and indeed members can table amendments in any committee. And some do, but not many’ (Interview-47). MEPs may do this if they have a particular interest in another policy area: ‘I have brought amendments to them, so you can work in that way as well, even though I am not on that committee ... if I get the committee chair to co-sign then I have a much greater chance of getting it through’ (Interview-27). However another MEP explained why this is rare in practice: ‘it’s a strange experience ... once ... I went to the budget control committee to raise some controversial

issues, and although I am a substitute, I never go ... The full time members were very upset ... Who was I to raise these things? I was a foreigner, an interloper' (Interview-41).

A second caveat is that whilst MEPs are assigned as full and substitute members, this does not mean they will attend these committees. They have a high degree of agency to choose how they spend their time in Brussels. They may not attend committees at all, particularly substitute committees, or allocate a junior office member to follow proceedings (Chapter 6). Neuhold and Dobbels found only 6-7 of 24 full members of the Fisheries committee were considered 'active' (2011:11).

Thirdly, whilst most MEPs tend to focus on committee based topics, they may (also) pursue *political* issues which do not fit into committee remits. An MEP described how he has never been 'enamoured' with the 'nitty gritty' of committee work and prefers to 'catch the tide of politics' and pursue 'political issues' (e.g. tourism corruption) *as a politician rather than a committee member*. However, his stories showed that he also focused for lengthy periods on technical issues, met stakeholders and acquired knowledge, and then deployed it strategically within the most appropriate CoPs to raise awareness, particularly utilising well-timed plenary interventions (Interview-48).

Whatever an MEP's foci, 'information is everything ... you have to be really well informed' (Interview-54). Particularly during committee *weeks*, the MEP meet regularly with stakeholders and actors perceived to be experts in his chosen issues⁵⁵. Usually these meetings would take place in his office, but more familiar actors were sometimes met in the MEPs' private bar. The range of actors included interest groups (NGOs, lobbyists, think tanks, consultancies, political foundations), the Permanent Representation, Commission officials, ambassadors, academics, lawyers, and constituents as well as other (usually group) MEPs, committee/delegation officials, group officials, and europarty staff. The purpose was (usually) to acquire knowledge about his interests and to aid with his pursuit of them. The meetings yielded different combinations of organisational, expert, and political knowledge - all required to play the game successfully.

Meetings with EP and committee officials tend to focus on organisational knowledge (e.g. deadlines and procedures) and those with group policy advisors, MEPs, and europarty staff

⁵⁵ See Field (2013) for further problematisation of 'expertise' in EU policy-making.

on political knowledge (e.g. voting lists, amendments, and manifestos). Meetings with other actors often focused more on expert knowledge, combined with political knowledge. For example, meetings with NGOs, lobbyists, ambassadors, and Perm Rep officials were either organised by the office to acquire further expert information or requested by these actors to supply the MEP with their positioned expert knowledge. Either way, the MEP or assistant would take notes, aware that information is not a neutral commodity (Marcella et al:1999:6) and that it is deployed in the political field to persuade other actors. This was tacitly acknowledged after some meetings when the MEP and assistants would assess what had been discussed, how useful it was, and how they might use resources gained – expert knowledge and any offers of further contacts or future events.

MEPs also acquire knowledge by attending the daily events in the EP. Often the organisers will invite external experts to disseminate information on reports being dealt with. The posters will indicate who has sponsored the event (often a rapporteur, shadow, group, or inter-group) and again MEPs are aware that information is not value-free (Photos 10-11). As a group official said, ‘we don't work in an ivory tower, so we are happy to receive information from civil society, then *we* decide what to do with it’ (Interview-57).

The MEP regularly reads international news and briefing material from different sources, particularly the assistants. He also attends conferences, workshops, roundtables, and high level meetings. All these activities facilitate specialisation. Knowledge gathered through these backstage activities enables MEPs to give convincing performances to the various CoPs of which they are members. The accumulation of this capital is crucial because MEPs must be well prepared to give credible and thus persuasive performances in the habitus, and group and committee meetings ‘tend to be the culmination, hopefully, of a lot of work done around the margins’ beforehand (Interview-1).

5.4.2 Re-contextualisation

Through these activities and practices, MEPs specialise in a few (often technical) issues. They strategically gather knowledge to become perceived as experts by other actors in the field. Knowledge is required for MEPs to give credible performances in the habitus. Inside the EP, MEPs move between backstage CoPs and re-contextualise their interests according

to the audience, to persuade them of their position. In this way, MEPs perform multiple roles.

5.4.2.1 How is re-contextualisation achieved?

'You have the same topics over and over again, in plenary, in private meetings, special committee meetings and then consultations with the high representatives. So at a certain point you can see a person's learning curve, also, is quite steep' (Interview-51).

Wodak outlines the idea of re-contextualisation used in this chapter. She shadowed an MEP for one day and analysed the transcription with a Discourse-Historical Approach (2009:28-56). Re-contextualisation is when a main argument re-appears in a different text: when an argument is taken out of context and re-stated in another, we observe de- and then re-contextualisation. The element acquires new meaning because meanings are formed in use. Arguments are re-contextualised in genre-appropriate ways (2009:39).

Wodak found MEPs construct their multiple identities in ever new ways depending on the context and 'politicians work in various domains which have to be factored into the analysis since without this contextual information the discursive behaviour of politicians would remain meaningless' (2009:7). Her MEP shifted frames smoothly and automatically between collegial exchanges, aggressively pushing an agenda, authoritatively advising, and analytically presenting an ideological programme - by selecting the appropriate genre, jargon, tone, and topoi for each audience. She suggests he had 'formulated for himself a very concise political agenda which he re-contextualises wherever possible, in his attempt to lobby support. One could even speculate as to whether this agenda serves as one of many organising principles throughout the daily chaos' (2009:151-2).

I indeed found that specialisation does serve as an organising principle. This strategy is part of MEPs' everyday practice of politics. MEPs re-contextualise their position on their specialist issues by changing masks to give credible performances according to the CoP they are putting on a show for at that moment. As Wodak found, this means altering their tone, posture, and content according to the audience, their interests, and time constraints. The MEP had a number of quotes, metaphors, and examples which he used repeatedly with different audiences because they had proved effective in conveying a message and engaging people. His arguments became familiar, and although the assistants sometimes wrote (new) speeches and continuously provided material, there is still limited time to

prepare information – particularly when the MEP has perhaps 6-10 meetings a day - so knowledge is often recycled over time and as the MEP moves across CoPs. Also, if a meeting was taken on a different issue, or one started to drift, the MEP usually tried to bring the discussion back to his specialist areas. A lobbyist working for a geographical region said some MEPs seem quite ‘un-knowing’ about their issues (Interview-5), but this is likely because it is not their specialist area.

When pursuing an interest with constituents, group colleagues, committee colleagues, an NGO, or in plenary, the MEP’s style and content varied. This is partly because, whilst constantly seeking support, the specific purpose of meetings varies. The MEP is interested in climate change. When discussing this work with constituents, he seeks electoral support and sometimes continuing campaign support. His performances are more relaxed (e.g. perching), staged in visitors’ rooms, casual in tone, and often include relaying his efforts and successes (e.g. facilitating conferences). Meanwhile discussions with interest groups often aim to extract expert knowledge; e.g. progress on international targets or new technologies. The meetings are usually staged in his office across his desk, or in the meeting room with him or an assistant taking notes.

More crucially, MEPs routinely give different performances to committee and group colleagues, negotiating the dual function. (Active) MEPs work closely with committee colleagues on legislative detail, often aiming to (consensually) pass a report through the committee vote. Discussions are often highly technical and require expert knowledge. However MEPs also embody their groups’ interest in this CoP. Meanwhile, during group *weeks*, MEPs present and sometimes defend their committee work to their group colleagues, where discussions often focus on political knowledge:

‘... we are working very closely together and each of us is trying to, in our group, lobby for REGI issues, so we are working like a small group within other groups’ (Interview-40)

‘Sometimes we have very big cleavages ...The Socialists ... were mostly agreeing with the rapporteur ... there was silence from the EPP representative and at the end they said “do we take this silence as agreement?” and he said “no, we’re against everything ... sorry I can’t even discuss with you any of the things’ (Interview-51)

‘...the committees are relatively effective at keeping hold of the outcome of their work... there will be some political...involvement of group leaders on big issues ... but that’s 5% of decision-making. Most of it is cooked in the committees because it’s only there you have the time and resources to find the compromises’ (Interview-35)

‘... [MEP] should know that because his [proposal] which got a virtually unanimous vote in committee twice, couldn’t find a majority in plenary ... either it shows they were not persuasive enough in their group about the value of the report or they were ... not representative of their group ... They could have been more pedagogical in trying to build up a majority in the group’ (Interview-47).

MEPs thus change masks to give convincing performances in backstage CoPs. In this way, spaces operate sometimes as a front and at other times as a back-region – notably committee and group meetings (Goffman:1959:127). As Wodak also found (2009:153), MEPs do not just perform on the public frontstage but perform constantly, wear different masks and play different roles when on stage in different (backstage) CoPs to present a credible and thus persuasive ‘self’.

5.4.2.2 Re-contextualisation as Strategy

Wodak reviews a documentary about the EP by Abélès called *La tribu exotique*, which follows an Irish MEP through a working day in the EP. She says the film brings her to ask, ‘are MEPs merely victims of self-made illusions? ... are they mistaken about their (non)-existing influence on policy-making?’ and suggests Abélès’ portrayal constructs MEPs as caught in a world of illusions, far away from meaningful realities, and ‘conveys a sense of anachronism and delusion’ (2009:74-5). However I found that individual MEPs who develop a feel for the game can exert influence. Specialisation and re-contextualisation enable MEPs to cope with the work environment they face, influence processes, and achieve successes in their chosen areas:

‘we punch much above our weight...the Greens were looked at as people with expertise...there’s an MEP from Luxembourg, who I think anybody in Parliament would agree is the Parliament’s expert on energy, even if you don’t agree with him, people would respect the fact he is deeply immersed in his subject...we’ve had a much bigger impact on ... the way in which the majorities go than some other MEPs’ (Interview-1).

Whilst the specific issues MEPs pursue on a daily basis may be technical, they are often ‘tiny, symbolic facets’ of bigger issues which link back to their broader ideologically based visions (Wodak:2009:185). In this sense, specialisation and re-contextualisation are everyday strategies, employed to enable MEPs to focus on something achievable and achieve success:

‘What I have realised and been advised, is not to do too much ... to think about what can I do in two years that is actually useful and not try to start something huge that I won’t be able to

complete ... it's not realistic to try and do everything because then you will just end up doing nothing on everything, rather than something on a few items (Interview-52)

'I certainly can't claim to have changed EU trade policy, but we have shone a spotlight on it and shown just how undemocratic it really is in practice' (Interview-1).

These strategies enable individual MEPs to cope with the competing interests and role dilemmas they face. Rather than playing one role, responding to one principle, or one variable explaining their (voting) behaviour – as some scholars have tried to establish to simplify this messy social world – MEPs actually perform multiple roles over the course of an EP calendar month. Specialisation and re-contextualisation are facilitated by the particular structuring of time here and the calendar also facilitates the performance of multiple roles. MEPs gather expert knowledge during committee *weeks* where they focus on the legislative function. They routinely perform the representative function in group and constituency *weeks*, re-contextualising these specialist interests in different CoPs. However, MEPs also often perform multiple roles on a daily basis (Appendix-11). On 7 April, the MEP met with his NPD to discuss the national perspective on reports; his delegation to discuss their detailed work on issues; attended committee *prep* to discuss the group's position on reports; gave a talk on his work to constituents; and acquired organisational knowledge from an official - changing his mask and performing different roles for each of these audiences.

We all exist in a nexus of multi-memberships to varying degrees and belong to many CoPs in full and peripheral ways (Wenger:1998:158-161). Some of these CoPs and the roles we play within them may be central to our identity whilst others are more incidental or even disparaged. Various forms of participation delineate pieces of the puzzle and boundaries may be created between roles. However roles we play interweave: parents discuss their children at work and hobbies at home, and MEPs may play their committee role in group or embody their national interest in committee. People engage in different practices in different CoPs and may behave differently in each - performing different 'selves' which are socially supported in that context. MEPs develop a feel for the game and realise (more) expert knowledge is required in committee and (more) political knowledge in group to convince other actors in these different audiences.

Whilst people perform multiple roles, these interact and influence each other and roles require some co-ordination. People actively work to reconcile different memberships⁵⁶ but ‘different practices can make competing demands that are difficult to combine into an experience that corresponds to a single identity’ (Wenger:1998:159). Reconciliation demands more than learning the rules of what to do when: it requires the construction of an identity which can include different forms of participation into one nexus which is not necessarily harmonious and may involve on-going tensions, as MEPs (may) experience; for example if their group rejects their committee work. Reconciliation involves actively creating bridges ‘across the landscape of practice’ (1998:161). Specialisation and re-contextualisation enable MEPs to negotiate multiple roles and interests. They enable MEPs to reconcile competing interests and create bridges across their performances given in various CoPs. The pursuit of specific issues provides latent order behind the apparent chaos in the EP, and brings purpose to individual MEPs’ constant movement and hectic activities. MEPs establish ‘existential coherence’ to give a narrative of their lives (Wodak:2009:115) and these strategies help them to solve on a practical level the contradictions they face (Kauppi:2011:164).

5.5 Coping Strategy: accumulating knowledge

Often organised from the office, MEPs also accumulate knowledge through different means to cope with this work environment and play the political game successfully. MEPs accumulate organisational, expert, and political knowledge to give credible performances within the habitus. They routinely accumulate knowledge by: (1) employing trusted assistants, (2) weaving an information network, and (3) regularly exchanging knowledge with trusted NPD and group colleagues. This section explores the social web in which MEPs are suspended and the role of the assistants, NPD, and group in routine knowledge exchange.

5.5.1 Trusted Assistants

Firstly, MEPs employ assistants and stagiaires in Brussels. From the office, these hidden actors play an important role in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics and their efforts can affect their MEP’s performances and thus their capacity to pursue their interests

⁵⁶ Goffman’s work suggests a performer has a continuing personal biography (Branaman:1997:l).

successfully. Backstage, assistants help prepare MEPs' frontstage performances and them to cope with the work environment they face: 'the amount of information you have to process, it's just not physically possible for one brain to do it all ... You just don't have the time to because you have to do other stuff' (Interview-52).

Assistants perform their role by gate-keeping their MEP's *previous* time and scheduling performances; filtering the information overload and enabling MEPs to achieve the crucial focus on their (specialist) interests; and by providing tailored knowledge on the MEP's specialist areas to help them give credible performances to persuade others and thus pursue their interests (more) successfully. Assistants are, to varying degrees, trusted to discard irrelevant information and extract relevant knowledge. They also take part in the EP policy process by, for example, following committees, writing amendments, and sometimes meeting independently with group members, officials, and interest groups. The previously virtually un-studied (Michon:2008) and often under-estimated role the assistants play in EP politics is further explored in Chapter 6.

5.5.2 Suspended in an (information) web

MEPs secondly, over time, develop a network from which to acquire knowledge. Once elected, they become positioned and suspended within a particular social web. However individuals have a high degree of agency to move around the web and extract knowledge from the sources they choose. MEPs, notably rapporteurs, are free to choose their sources, unlike national ministers who must co-operate with civil servants (Neunreither:2003:49). Perhaps a metaphor of a spider suspended on a delicate but intricately ordered web but moving across this structure at their will, is appropriate.

Legislators' need for 'accurate and timely information' has grown with the increasing complexity of government, nationally and supranationally (Marcella et al:1999). The EP's recent empowerment by The Lisbon Treaty raises the question of how it will adapt to fulfil its legislative role, a pertinent issue being where MEPs will get information required for policy-making (Neuhold&Dobbels:2011). Wodak (2009) explores the relationship between information, knowledge, and power in the EP. She argues (complex) organisations depend on CoPs because of the expert knowledge fostered within them (2009:14-15). The possession of expert knowledge gives actors access to the political process. Wodak's work

shows understanding knowledge management processes is an important part of understanding how institutions work: ‘the distribution of knowledge is, of course, a question of hierarchy and power, of access, in organisations’ (2009:26).

Examining knowledge management and acquisition strategies (e.g. who is sought out, who is disregarded, and how this process is practiced) can help us grasp the constellation of actors routinely involved in EP politics⁵⁷. Throughout this thesis, exploring knowledge management strategies helps us to further understand MEPs’ everyday practice of politics. Exploring MEPs’ acquisition of expert knowledge further problematises the notions of “expertise” and “specialists” used regularly by participants:

‘Rapporteurs study hard, but they aren’t specialists their whole lives, so they ask NGOs, industry in other groups, and there’s lots of informal “finding out the answers from people” - what are the implications of the legislation, can it work – liaise with the shadows, and all that work which is part of the process of creating something’ (Interview-3)

‘A lot can depend on your reputation ... ultimately some politicians can very quickly change their minds. So if you submit something to them and they think it’s not very good, then you’re no longer the experts!’ (Interview-51).

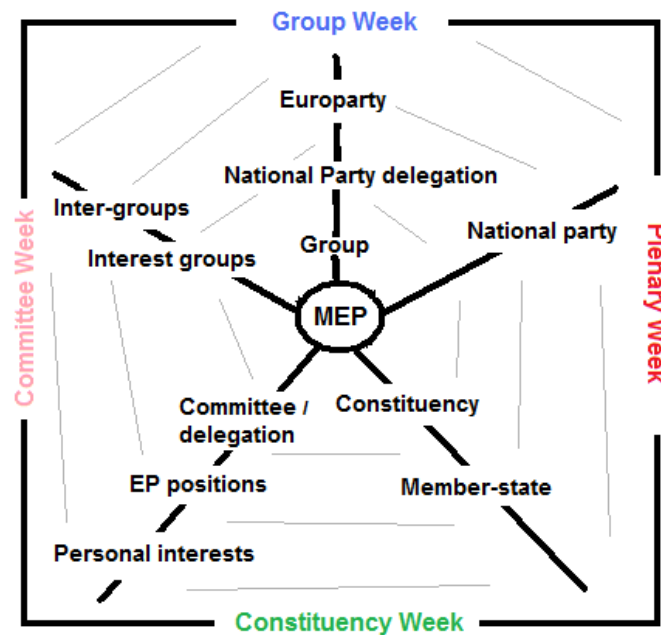
An array of actors regularly vies for the MEP’s attention in Brussels and routinely (try to) supply him with knowledge and, for many, their vision or position (Appendices 9-10). Figure 5.1 (below) has been constructed from participant observation and with data from Appendix 10 in mind. It illustrates the constellation of actors routinely demanding the MEP’s attention. The web indicates potential sources of knowledge available to MEPs; committee, delegation, and EP officials can supply organisational and often expert knowledge; group policy advisors and officials and national parties political (and expert) knowledge; and interest groups and inter-groups expert (and political) knowledge.

The diagram firstly conveys an understanding of MEPs as active agents suspended within a particular social web but able to move freely and choose their own priorities. Secondly it illustrates that actors tug with varying degrees of strength and urgency during different *weeks*. MEPs exchange knowledge routinely with committee colleagues and interest groups during committee *weeks* and with their group and NPD during group *weeks*: the group contacted the office 23 times in plenary week, 11 in group, and 10 in committee week, whilst the committee contacted the office 21 times in committee week, 12 in plenary, and

⁵⁷ See also Jensen and Winzen’s (2012) work on social network analysis in the EP.

11 in group week (Appendix-10). However as the structure implies, whilst interaction might be concentrated within particular *weeks*, MEPs can choose to meet and acquire knowledge from any of these actors any time and they may overlap into different phases of the calendar, so the web is fluid rather than rigid.

Figure 5.1: Suspended in a web



(Source: author's own illustrative diagram).

Over time, MEPs weave a network from which they routinely acquire knowledge. The MEP had identified particular individuals within the EP secretariat to deal with administrative issues more efficiently (organisational knowledge). There were also particular officials from his committee and delegation secretariats who he met regularly. The size of NPDs is taken into account when group officials are employed and this may affect the officials an MEP routinely contacts – perhaps because of language skills – for political knowledge. The MEP regularly met with a selection of group officials to discuss reports and administrative issues, particularly the relevant policy advisor for his committee, the press officer occasionally, and administrative officials to deal with events management.

The MEP has also woven a network of interest groups he regularly works with and often individuals within them. Information was provided regularly by email and individuals would visit when organising events together which the MEP was sponsoring and the office facilitating. These interactions were more informal with the individuals strolling in, chatting

with the assistants, joking, and sometimes they would go for coffee with the MEP. The assistants more often paid attention to information provided by them. Interactions with less and un-familiar actors were more formal with the individual being met at reception, them waiting patiently for the MEP to emerge, held in the meeting room, shaking hands, dressed more formally, and usually with them giving a pre-prepared show.

MEPs gave different views on how useful different (knowledge) sources are and how they use them, and they use different actors in different combinations. Hix and Høyland (2011:183) found MEPs are more likely to interact with interest groups who share their preferences; environmental groups were mostly likely to be in contact with Green/EFA MEPs, trade unions with socialists, and industry groups with the EPP and ALDE (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: MEPs' contact with interest groups

[INSERT GRAPH HERE]

(Source: Hix & Høyland:2011:184, from Rasmussen:2013, Table 1.2)

Interviews and the survey suggested that the constellation of interest groups MEPs interact with also depends on their committee; e.g. ENVI MEPs meet (more) routinely with environmental interest groups, AFET MEPs with ambassadors, and EMPL MEPs with business and employers' groups (see Rasmussen:2013). However, as Appendix C (Q11-12) shows, many offices also routinely interact with committee and group secretariats. As an official explained, there is a lot of space for external experts in the EP because of the highly technical nature of EU legislation and lack of time to find and prepare digestible expert knowledge. Officials play a key role because they possess varying amounts of expert knowledge, but also organisational knowledge and are (more) aware of procedures, remits, and cultures. An interest group had advised the EP to hold a debate on an issue which is not in-keeping with its working culture because they lacked sufficient knowledge of the EP's scope and practices (Interview-23). Again, all three types of knowledge (organisational, expert, and political) are required for an MEP to play the game successfully.

5.5.3 The First Port of Call

MEPs (can) weave a dense web from where they regularly acquire knowledge, including internal and external, national and transnational, and political and administrative sources. However, the survey revealed that assistants' most frequent source of information for the MEP office is 'other assistants' and that the people and organisations they work with most often include the group secretariat (27% of respondents), followed by NPD assistants, group policy advisors, and committee secretariats (each 21%) and NPD colleagues also ranked highly (15%). This pattern was observed during fieldwork. The actors which MEPs and their offices most frequently interact with on a daily basis and routinely request and acquire knowledge from, are their NPD and group colleagues.

When I began the fieldwork internship, the assistant said that if I ever had any questions then to pick up the phone and call the other NPD offices for advice and if they didn't have the answer then to try someone else in the group. The NPD in particular acts as the *first port of call*. Both of the assistants regularly phoned other NPD offices for updates and advice and some of the calls to our office each day would be from them. Nearly as many emails were received from the NPD each day as from the entire group (Appendix-10). An assistant said that, particularly constituents, expect MEPs to be specialists in everything and they get called on all sorts of topics, including banning tomato extract. You can't know about everything or you would 'just drown' and therefore she calls other offices in the group who do specialise in the query topic (Interview-3).

In June, the MEP gave me a task which involved contacting other NPDs in the group to write a briefing. He added this would also be useful as an opportunity to get to know other offices in the group which was important. Once an office starts following committees and particularly when the MEP is involved in a report, they then work with other MEPs and their offices as well as relevant group and committee staff. Relationships are therefore built outwards in ripples from each office epicentre, with NPD and group colleagues and staff occupying the closest circles, acting as the *first port of call*.

MEPs (and assistants) in the NPD exchange knowledge formally routinely and informally regularly. The NPD meets formally multiple times during group *weeks* (Chapters 7), during committee weeks for breakfast, and on Mondays in plenary *weeks*. They update each other

on progress in their committees, particularly on reports to be discussed that plenary. The NPD assistants also meet formally every Friday (Chapter 6). Outside of these formal spaces, NPD colleagues' regular informal interaction is facilitated by the spatial arrangement of MEP offices in Espace Léopold. Each floor or sets of floors tend to house particular groups and NPDs occupy offices grouped together within these floors. Doors tend to be left open and greetings called and people regularly pop into each others' offices for discussions as well as meeting in the corridors and copy rooms and at the pigeon holes dotted around (also Belkacem:2013). The MEP's office was located on the floor above, separated from his NPD colleagues. This interaction occurred on the floor below among these colleagues. On our floor, the three other NPDs regularly interacted among themselves, but less often with each other or us and (extra) effort had to be made to go down and see our fellow NPD assistants.

Members of the NPD and group act as the *first port of call* when offices require further knowledge, particularly about areas the MEP does not follow routinely. These CoPs help MEPs to cope with the work environment they face. MEPs focus on particular issues to achieve success and do not have the resources to follow every EP committee and initiative, and they therefore rely on trusted NPD and group colleagues. This coping strategy is explored further in Chapters 6-7 where the role of these structures is explored further.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored mundane activities and routines occurring backstage in the MEP office, a site of activity found through fieldwork to be central to individual MEPs' daily endeavour here. I have argued that MEPs employ particular everyday strategies to cope with the particular work environment they face, to pursue their aims more successfully. By exploring banal backstage activities and routines, we gain a deeper understanding of MEP behaviour as a social practice and see MEPs as active agents rather than bearers of structures. This reveals the ways in which the office team organises and prepares their show - MEPs' performances - to enable MEPs to give credible performances and persuade others to play the game successfully. Ethnography enabled me to explore what MEPs' time in Brussels consists of and how they experience the EP as an institution and workplace and practice politics within it. Seeing that most MEPs (only) spend three days a week in Brussels/Strasbourg, return to their constituencies weekly, and the ways in which they

spend their time focused on issues, perhaps we should not be surprised that empirical investigations have not found the form of Europeanization anticipated in MEPs' voting behaviour (see Scully:2005).

The following findings have been presented. Firstly, this workplace is characterised by constant movement, shortage of time, information overload, highly technical information, and bureaucracy, meaning organisational and expert knowledge are required to play the game. MEPs' time and activities are organised strategically from the office to create order in this chaos. Their frontstage performances are scheduled and prepared so that they can give credible performances within the habitus.

Secondly, MEPs consciously and unconsciously develop particular strategies to cope with this work environment, including specialisation, re-contextualisation, and knowledge management. Many MEPs focus on and specialise in a narrow range of technical issues which usually relate to their committee(s). Specialisation is achieved by focusing their time and efforts on a few issues by attending and organising relevant meetings to acquire knowledge to pursue their agenda. MEPs re-contextualise these interests as they move between different CoPs, changing masks according to the audience to give credible performances in the pursuit of their interests. In this way, MEPs perform multiple roles often on a daily basis and negotiate the dual function. However specialist interests also facilitate reconciliation of roles and give meaning, purpose, and coherence to individual MEPs' constant movement and activities. Alternative strategies to policy specialisation within committees, particularly the acquisition of group leadership positions, are explored in Chapter 8. MEPs also accumulate knowledge by employing trusted assistants, weaving a network from which to acquire knowledge, and routinely exchanging knowledge with trusted NPD and group colleagues who act as their *first port of call* in their non-specialist areas. The roles the assistants, NPD, and group play in MEPs' everyday practice of politics are explored further in the next two chapters.

Chapter 6: **The MEP Assistants: acting as information interfaces**

‘I can see the difference between MEPs who have employed competent assistants and those who have decided not to employ assistants, or just back in their constituency ... it does make a difference. If you’re doing your job properly as an MEP there is an awful lot of work to be done and your impact and role and influence in this place will be enhanced if you have got the backing of one or two or more assistants’
(Interview-49).

6.1 Assistants as Filters

On the first day of the fieldwork internship, the MEP’s assistant introduced me to the stagiaire role which I would be performing for seven months. She gave me a tour of Espace Léopold and then we returned to the office where she and the former stagiaire introduced me to the office and some of its procedures and outlined the tasks I would be responsible for. She then turned to the email inbox which had been pinging in the background. New messages appeared before our eyes and as she scanned through them, I noticed there were about 200 for that day alone which I was to help keep an eye on, along with attending committee, group, and conducting administrative tasks. I began to wonder how I was going to balance being a stagiaire and ethnographer. This concern must have been apparent because she laughed and reassured me; *don’t worry, you’ll soon learn which ones are ‘actually’ important!*

As discussed, the MEP’s office receives many emails and large quantities of often technical information every day. The assistant explained that I would soon learn that much of this was ‘not important’ and that it was part of our role to discard the irrelevant and extract relevant communications and information for the MEP. I quickly came to see the assistants as filters, stemming the avalanche of information arriving daily and regulating the flow of knowledge to the MEP. It is crucial assistants are aware of which actors should be allowed access to the MEP and his time, what knowledge should be passed on to enable him to pursue his interests more successfully, and what should be discarded so he can focus. By further exploring assistants’ filtering role and knowledge management strategies (Wodak:2009:26), we can firstly understand the vital role these hidden actors play inside the EP, and secondly how their part in the backstage preparation of MEPs’ performances can affect an MEP’s ability to exert influence and play the game successfully.

6.2 Introduction

Chapter 5 explored the MEP office as a site of political activity from which we can learn much about the ways in which individual MEPs practice politics inside the EP. It raised MEPs' employment of trusted assistants as an everyday coping strategy. This chapter further investigates the role of the assistants. I argue that they perform the role of 'information interfaces' within the MEP office, acting to help them cope and practice politics more successfully. The argument progresses as follows. Assistants play a vital backstage role because of the particular work environment MEPs face in Brussels. Their activities and efforts help to prepare MEPs' frontstage performances and can affect an MEP's capacity to exert influence. It is therefore important we understand their role. A *spectrum* characterises assistants' activities: some play the part of policy advisor and others perform a more secretarial function, depending on their own levels of capital and competence and their MEP's wishes. Through their mundane office activities, assistants act as 'information interfaces' by 'gate-keeping' their MEP's *precious* time, 'filtering' the information overload, and 'tailoring' further knowledge to prepare performances and help MEPs play the game more successfully. Assistants regularly interface with a range of actors to acquire knowledge for the office, particularly other EP staff. However, they routinely exchange knowledge and resources with NPD and group colleagues meaning these structures are routinely the source of knowledge which reaches MEPs' desks. The assistants' practices therefore reinforce the important role these CoPs play in MEPs' everyday practice of politics.

Regarding the research question, this chapter explores the vital backstage role assistants play in individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics. They help prepare MEPs' frontstage performances so they can give credible performances within the habitus. An assistant's level of competence and amount of capital can therefore affect an individual MEP's capacity to exert influence which is why we must explore their role more closely. Regarding the research issues, this chapter focuses on everyday strategies and begins to investigate how MEPs make decisions (Chapter 7). Regarding the theoretical framework, it explores the NPD assistants as a backstage CoP, their capital and strategies, and ways in which the office team prepares their show. This chapter particularly utilises the survey data⁵⁸ (Appendix C). Section 1 provides descriptive background information on the assistants and

⁵⁸ The survey was designed to further explore the role of assistants, rather than to make statistical inferences.

their activities. Section 2 explores their role as ‘information interfaces’. Section 3 then investigates assistants’ sources of knowledge and their social and communication practices, highlighting the important role the NPD and group play in routine knowledge exchange.

6.3 The MEP Assistants

In Brussels, you frequently hear that if you want to know anything about the EP, you should speak to the assistants. Numerous MEPs raised the importance for them of having *good* assistants (Interviews-1,18,43,39,45,52,27,28,42,54). However these hidden actors have remained virtually un-studied (Michon:2008, 2004, Wodak:2009:113-155). Neunreither refers to them as a ‘largely unused’ workforce (2003:57) and their vital role in the everyday practice of EP politics has remained under-estimated. However, since The Lisbon Treaty has further empowered the EP and (active) MEPs have become ever busier, assistants’ knowledge management role has become increasingly important.

6.3.1 The *Eyes and Ears*: why are the assistants important?

Whilst it is almost ‘conventional wisdom’ that politicians cannot make all their decisions alone (Van Schendelen&Scully:2003:122), EP assistants play an important role for reasons relating to the particular transnational work context MEPs practice politics in (Chapter 5). The dual seat and calendars’ structuring of time mean MEPs are constantly travelling and:

‘some assistants almost act like pseudo MEPs ... MEPs are often absent or away, the assistants go to the meetings on their behalf and some of them, sometimes, even speak up on their behalf saying “my member says this, that”, so without a good assistant you are lost in this place’ (Interview-49).

The EP has traditionally suffered from high absenteeism (Scully:2007:180) and high turnover (Corbett et al:2011:51). Staff therefore play an important role in keeping the institution ‘ticking over’ whilst MEPs are absent and learning the ropes: one official described EP officials as the permanent supporting bottle encasing the wine (Interview-16). Assistants can help to support new MEPs and one described how her assistant had arranged ‘all the bureaucratic stuff’ such as HR forms (Interview-52) and three other MEPs said they had intentionally initially employed experienced assistants to help them (Interviews-43,39,45).

Whilst the MEP was searching for his new assistant, he explained assistants are crucial because they are his *eyes and ears* trusted to *spot and catch* important developments in Brussels whilst he is absent. The physicality of this metaphor is revealing: the bodily terminology suggests assistants form part of the physical form, or are part of the physical performance, of the part of an MEP. The assistants observe proceedings and filter and transmit knowledge back to the MEP. Without their (sensory) input about the landscape, the MEP could not perform his role so effectively. An official also described assistants' legislative support in Brussels as vital because 'if [MEPs] are doing their job properly, [they] will be having lots of meetings, ... travelling all the time, wasting time in airports and not able to attend all meetings, some meetings will run in parallel, you need a second pair of ears' (Interview-49). It is therefore important MEPs have good rapport with their assistants because a high level of trust is required. Assistants are trusted to be MEPs' *eyes and ears* and to also routinely make decisions about what does and does not reach their in-tray.

6.3.2 Who are the Assistants?

It is therefore important we learn more about these hidden actors and their dynamic role. In 2009 there were over 1,300 accredited assistants, with most MEPs employing 2-4 people as a combination of well-paid assistants and less well-paid stagiaires (Corbett et al:2011:73-77,220). Michon argues this role is a 'springboard': assistants work in the background 'holding subordinate, precarious positions' which are 'a step in a "rite of institution" that opens the way to a career in EU public offices' (2008:169).

Before the Assistants' Statute⁵⁹, their status was controversial because MEPs were assistants' employers and conditions varied widely (Corbett et al: 2011:75). An unofficial association formed in the 1990's which sought regulation but made little headway. The EP finally approved the Statute in 2008 which regulates conditions and payments and puts assistants on a similar legal footing to other EU officials, although MEPs still have discretion in choosing and dismissing assistants. Assistants are now entitled to training and have their own Board to raise issues (Interviews-10,30,38). The Statute seems to have enhanced their status:

'Five years as an assistant you can be paid a decent salary and if you work well and for an influential MEP it's a good stepping stone for the future, to work for lobby groups, industry,

⁵⁹ Council Regulation (EC) No 160/2009 of 23 February 2009.

NGOs, or even the administration, whereas previously, salaries varied hugely according to the ... MEP. Now they're fixed on a logical scale ... So it is a proper career choice and I think it has attracted better quality assistants ... [they have] a bit more permanence and a better feeling about their working conditions'⁶⁰ (Interview-49).

Fieldwork and the survey revealed these characteristics of this self-selected elite transnational group: they are young, mobile, and well-educated. The survey showed a balanced gender ratio and average age of 28 (mode=25). Nearly 70% shared their MEP's nationality and many come to Brussels for the position. Some MEPs employ staff from different member-states to acquire languages for the office, particularly if their own skills are weak (Interview-7). This group is cosmopolitan; discussions indicated they are often multi-lingual, well-travelled and/or have studied abroad, being highly mobile. It is important to study the assistants as individuals on a career trajectory rather than as a static group. They are building their careers and this is reflected in the high turnover of the group: nearly 45% had held their position for less than a year and nearly 85% for up to and including three years. An official told me, *you need to watch assistants because you never know who will come back as an ambassador*.

The assistants are well-educated: 25% of respondents had a Masters and I found many were recent graduates⁶¹. When asked about their qualifications and experience, 56% cited university qualifications and some mentioned related positions such as working for a national party, national Ministry, or other Brussels-based internships. When asked why they applied for the job, it was most frequently because it linked to their university qualification, to gain international experience, or because they were interested in European integration⁶². Seven respondents were sought by their MEP because of their expertise: 'my MEP happened to know one of my professors and he suggested me as a macroeconomic expert' (Respondent-21, Q-7). An official said some assistants are more qualified in the EU than their MEP, many having done European Studies or being trainee lawyers (Interview-49). The survey found they often take the position to gain knowledge of the EU, work experience, and contacts - to pursue a career in Brussels or similar back home. The role is commonly an early career move and for social science graduates, this is 'one of the natural points to get in' to the EU (Respondent-5, Q-7). An assistant said she felt unusual having not studied the EU and that most assistants are aiming for the institutions (Interview-3).

⁶⁰ This is different for stagiaires, when one got a permanent job another joked *you don't often hear of those here*.

⁶¹ The assistants sometimes discussed the 'Bruges mafia' and (unfair) advantage College of Europe graduates are said to have in Brussels from networking there. One graduate was keen to dismiss this myth (Interview-4) but it is an area warranting further research (Schnabel:1998,2002).

⁶² Assistants aren't necessarily pro-European, particularly those working for eurosceptic MEPs (Interview-2).

Another explained at length that ‘the easiest way to get in the institutions is starting from a stage’ (Interview-7). Her trajectory was planned, this was why she had come to Belgium for her Masters, where everyone’s goal was the institutions via a stage, but success depends on differentiating yourself. However I found other assistants’ journeys to the EP were less pre-planned (Interviews-2&3).

6.3.3 What do Assistants do?

The MEP’s office consists of his private office and an adjoining space for the assistants separated by an internal door which is usually left open for frequent discussions. The assistants’ working rhythm mirrors his. They arrive early on Mondays to check the schedule, briefings, and get a head start. Whilst the MEP is present, the assistant ensures he gets to meetings on time and is prepared, that requests are answered and visitors met, and that they attend committee and other meetings which overlap for the MEP. The MEP is in constant contact by text giving instructions. Once he departs (and in constituency *weeks*), the pace slows and the assistants catch up on on-going projects and take longer lunches and coffee meetings. Assistants relax their own performances of their professional self given to their MEPs, signalled by the dressing down which characterises *Functionnaire Fridays* (see Goffman:1959:112-4).

6.3.3.1 Assistants’ Tasks

I participated in assistants’ backstage practices and organisational and knowledge management role, which can affect how successfully an MEP can perform their role:

‘Seeing how much work there is for the MEPs, it is very hard to imagine one person managing all of it on their own. The amount of work that the assistants put in to make sure that the MEP is informed and organised is crucial for allowing the MEP to make educated decisions’ (Respondent-6, Q-14).

The assistant ensures the MEP’s *precious* time is organised, that he is prepared with knowledge to give credible performances, and that he moves smoothly between meetings – to present a professional ‘self’. My own experiences were reflected in the survey responses (Question-10), suggesting assistants’ tasks are similar across groups and nationalities.

Assistants conduct a range of backstage tasks to help prepare the show. Office tasks – e.g. diary management and checking emails – were included by most respondents (81%), demonstrating the vital role assistants play in organising the minutiae of an MEP's time here. As discussed, diary management is crucial for an MEP to present a professional 'self'. Legislative tasks were commonly cited (67%) which reflected the activities I observed the MEP's assistants engage in. Assistants' legislative activities show their deep and extensive involvement in the EP policy process: they follow committees; draft amendments; and (help) write reports, draft resolutions, and voting lists. An official said, 'here we vote on thousands of amendments at a time and all sorts of technical minutiae that perhaps a national parliament would leave to their civil service. That also explains the need for assistants, to wade through the massive amount of amendments' (Interview-49). Some assistants follow committees so closely that they can end up knowing procedures better than MEPs; in a meeting an MEP asked about an amendment procedure and an assistant clarified this for him. In their weekly meeting, the NPD assistants would often joke about the detailed nature of their committee work, such as spending weeks working on the exact measurement of chicken cages or van emissions. Assistants' legislative work can be particularly important in smaller NPDs where the MEPs cannot cover all the committees among themselves:

'...our assistants are working many hours to cover all 20 committees. Especially as my party is in government at home, and I really have to make sure that they don't make problems for our prime minister, so every single amendment is being checked, on every committee' (Interview-42)

'I have very good cooperation ... with [name], who is also non-aligned ... We put our assistants together, so they know our positions. For some reports we split the plenary preparation and we said "this office is doing this, this office is doing that" (Interview-54).

Some assistants say they give their MEPs policy advice (17%) and may even negotiate on their behalf. The meetings category⁶³ suggests support for this: some assistants attend meetings their MEP cannot. The political tasks illustrate assistants' involvement in institutional politics; 25% included political tasks with 17% saying they give their MEP political or strategic advice and 10% meet independently with the group or NPD. Meanwhile, 13% said advice from assistants helps their MEP decide how to vote (Question-15). An MEP said, '...we have been very fortunate in the assistant I've got here – [name] is bloody good at the politics as well, and we're a political office, I make that clear

⁶³ The Meetings and Questions categories were created because we cannot know their purpose.

when I recruit anyone ... we are here to look for issues we can run in [member-state]' (Interview-28).

Other categories further illustrate assistants' important backstage role. Over half of respondents said they conduct research, most often referring to writing briefings which help MEPs prepare credible performances and aid decision-making. Assistants may be involved in presenting their MEP's (frontstage) image: they carry out media tasks (e.g. writing press releases) and some are involved with constituent relations, although MEPs often also have constituency staff. Four respondents said they organise events, but this was something I found was an important part of institutional life and most of the NPD assistants had organised events. After one facilitated a seminar for an interest group which the MEP sponsored, they thanked him in the closing speech, but came after to stress their gratitude for her help, acknowledging assistants' possession of important organisational knowledge⁶⁴.

6.3.3.2 The Assistant Spectrum

Rather than a mutually exclusive typology, I found a *spectrum* characterises the work of assistants. Assistants are not confined to one role and indeed they are often expected to perform all of these tasks most days. When discussing the imminent arrival of the MEP's new assistant with an official, he asked where I thought she would fall on the *assistant spectrum*. He said some assistants tend towards the secretarial end and others the political advisor end of a *spectrum* which has combination roles in the middle. Discussing the first report she had worked on, one assistant described how she had followed the committee, discussed the key message with the MEP, researched and wrote parts of the report, and had dealt with the amendments submitted by her own and other groups. However, Corbett et al suggest assistants drafting reports 'still tends to be the exception' and that many carry out secretarial tasks (2007:67). Most respondents said they were an 'assistant' or 'stagiaire', and only 4% called themselves 'Assistant/Policy Advisor' (Question-5).

Where an assistant falls on the *spectrum* depends, firstly, on their own capital, competence, and ambitions, and, secondly, on the skills and temperament of the MEP and demands of any offices they hold. Whilst some MEPs want policy and political advice and expect their

⁶⁴ Michon (2004) says assistants play four roles; secretary, PR, legislative, and political.

assistants to become involved in committee work, others prefer them to perform a (more) secretarial function, perhaps if they are more independent, longer serving, and have good technology skills. A stagiaire said of her long-serving MEP, 'he's someone that doesn't need an assistant' (Interview-4). Another said, 'it's pretty full on, I'd say it takes over your life ... But that probably depends who you work for' and that for a newcomer, what you get can be 'luck of the draw' (Interview-2). Therefore what makes a *good* assistant varies. However the *spectrum* indicates the growing importance of some assistants who perform a policy advisor role (see Webb&Fisher:2003). A lobbyist told me they are increasingly keen to meet assistants who they recognise play a key role in briefing MEPs. They find MEPs are increasingly busy with legislative work after Lisbon and cannot see lobbyists so often, so instead they sometimes approach assistants, but those further up the lobbying *food-chain* take the MEP meetings.

6.3.3.3 Multi-tasking and Prestige

Two further interesting observations about assistants' activities emerged. Firstly, a high degree of multitasking is expected of them. They are often expected to perform many of the tasks discussed, if not every day, then certainly across an EP calendar month. The second assistant, who had previously worked in the private sector, said that she had initially been surprised by the different skill-sets expected from one person who is a secretary, researcher, advisor, and negotiator all in one. Assistants are expected to be generalists but to gain expertise in the MEP's interests.

Secondly, division of labour is decided in each office but there is a link between length of service and tasks conducted. More prestigious tasks tend to be reserved for longer-serving staff; for example giving political/policy advice, writing reports, and meeting external actors. Meanwhile newer staff (particularly those under 3-months) and stagiaires are often left with more mundane tasks; e.g. booking travel, sorting post, and perhaps drafting amendments. These tasks serve as an apprenticeship period which participants are often keen to move up and on from. Stagiaires and some assistants often complained about EP bureaucracy, particularly around organising events (Q-18, 21). The assistants do not see themselves as part of the EP bureaucracy, but as users of it. Some said they would prefer to do more 'useful' rather than bureaucratic tasks, but often this meant more prestigious or

political tasks (e.g. working on reports and meeting lobbyists) which are often left for the senior assistant:

‘The endless bureaucracy of the administration. I understand it is needed to some extent but enough is enough’ (Respondent-8, Q-18)

‘The bureaucracy, I use too much time on battling with that instead of doing something useful’ (Respondent-30, Q-18).

Offices tend to have a senior assistant who has (usually) served the longest. Their seniority might be displayed through ownership of the best desk whilst stagiaires are squeezed in. MEPs are members and substitutes of committees and the senior assistant is likely to follow the main committee and junior members substitute committees. A senior assistant said it is easier for her to follow the main committee because she knows the history, issues, and characters, and it is easier for her to focus if she gives stagiaires, who come and go frequently, self-contained tasks (e.g. Written Declarations). However, in practice this hierarchy is quite fluid. The division of labour means all staff can be valued by MEPs and the MEP gave instructions directly to stagiaires (also Belkacem:2013) and an assistant said, ‘it’s very busy and there’s forever work to do and [MEP] only has one full-time assistant, so the stagiaire takes on a kind of a second assistant role’ (Interview-2).

6.4 ‘Information Interfaces’

Wodak says you cannot document an MEP’s day without mentioning their assistant and that MEPs ‘would probably be totally disoriented and lost’ without them⁶⁵ (2009:117-8). An assistant said some ‘other MEPs are propped up by their assistants, and they’re the ones telling them where to vote and what to do’ (Interview-2). Through the mundane tasks described, assistants help prepare MEPs to give credible performances and routinely inform their everyday practice of politics. The organisational and knowledge management practices assistants engage in are vital for MEPs because, ‘the quality of the decision relies upon the quality of the information available’ (in Marcella et al:1999:5). By performing their knowledge management role, assistants become powerful (hidden) actors. Through it, an assistant is in charge of and ‘gains knowledge (and thus power) by selectively managing flows of information from the ‘centre’ [*the secretariat*], and thus MEPs depend heavily on them’ (Wodak:2009:117–8). I argue that assistants play a vital role as ‘information

⁶⁵ There are mixed views on this; ‘assistants have too much power nowadays, since a lot of MEPs are too busy and let the assistants decide’ (Respondent-11, Q-17).

interfaces' in the MEP offices which they fulfil by carrying out the three core functions outlined below. As Respondent-37 said:

'assistants have varying levels of direct influence, but significant indirect influence through selectivity of correspondence they choose to highlight, reports they raise, and amendments they choose to identify as important. MEPs cannot read and be experts on every piece of legislation they vote on, nor do policy advisors highlight every report in full detail' (Q-13).

6.4.1 Gate-Keeping

Firstly, EP assistants, like secretaries anywhere, perform a gate-keeping function to protect the back-region, their show, and 'the self' presented by their MEP in performances. Anyone, known or unknown, trying to speak to, meet, or send information to an MEP will usually have to get through the assistant who embodies their MEP's interest. This is why a high level of trust between the MEP and his assistants is crucial because he often relies on them to identify the relevant and dismiss the less relevant. This is because, as described, MEPs are constantly short of time and focus on a narrow range of issues. Assistants are trusted to *spot* what is important enough to be given the MEP's (*precious*) time.

Gate-keeping occurs in a number of ways. Physically, assistants may refuse entry to those who appear unscheduled at the door – although this is rare because of the high levels of security and visitors are likely acquaintances of the MEP. However, visitors may be lobbyists who have access to Espace Léopold in committee and group *weeks*. The assistants sometimes also extract the MEP from over-running meetings or cut them short in a pre-arranged manner. Gate-keeping most often occurs via the phone and email. Interest groups, officials, and other MEP offices regularly call, but usually they are asked for a message so their level of urgency can be assessed and the MEP can decide whether to call them back. Whilst this may be frustrating for recipients, acting as guardians of their MEP's (*precious*) time is an important part of assistants' job. Gate-keeping also occurs via e-mail where assistants will inform actors whether there is space in the diary or not for their meeting or event.

6.4.2 Filtering

The assistants also perform a filtering function. As discussed, MEP offices receive large volumes of information every day. Again, the assistants are trusted to filter this avalanche,

dispose of the irrelevant, and extract and order the relevant and urgent. Each office has their own particular (information management) procedures and MEPs may check emails themselves to varying degrees, depending on their technology skills and temperament. At the start of the internship, the assistant and MEP briefed me on his interests and *priorities*. These *priorities* were then used to filter communications and the *information overload* and to decide what would routinely make it into his in-tray. At first I tried to read all the leaflets and scan all the briefings but the assistant laughed and said I would soon get sick of this and throw them out automatically like everyone else, as I did.

Post is delivered twice a day to the pigeon-hole and insiders can put mail in the third floor bank. *Non-priority* invites and briefing material, often from interest groups, are often instantly recycled whilst relevant material is put into files in the MEP's in-tray. If action is required, this will be indicated by the MEP when the files are returned. Files are kept for invites, group and NPD communications, committees and delegations, and for on-going projects. A similar system operates for the inbox: irrelevant emails are deleted, relevant emails filed, and urgent emails extracted. The second assistant also had a coloured flagging system for projects.

Actors in Brussels may (also) not fully understand the extent of the assistants' role. An assistant said a friend at an obscure lobby firm was 'genuinely astounded' she threw away invites herself (Interview-3) and a lobbyist assumed if mail was addressed to MEPs they were obliged to open it so they therefore addressed all their material individually. As well as commanding hours of assistants' direct attention, the inbox constantly pings in the background (Belkacem:2013). An assistant said it is a 'bind' which you fear leaving in case you miss something crucial, especially during plenary weeks (Interview-3). However the filtering function is also vital to protect the MEP's (*precious*) time and to stop him from drowning in the *information overload* to ensure he has time to focus and digest relevant information to prepare to give credible performances on his *priority* issues and therefore play the game more successfully.

6.4.3 Tailoring

Thirdly, the assistants also regularly provide tailored information to the MEP, either as part of their routine tasks or at his direct request. Tailoring is achieved, firstly, by passing on

communications in accordance with his *priorities*, along with what the assistant assesses to be important for him to be aware of. This might be communications and information relating to salient issues, debates within the group or committee, or information from the national party or Permanent Representation. Secondly, the assistants acquire and process further information (particularly expert knowledge) by conducting further research. This is vital for MEPs as actors giving performances in a habitus where appearing knowledgeable is crucial to credibility. Asked how she got into a new policy area an MEP said, ‘you speak to people who know about it, you get your assistants to do some research and priority briefings, you speak to colleagues who have worked on it’ (Interview-52).

Tailored information can take the form of urgent pieces of information (e.g. statistics) quickly texted as last minute additions to a speech. However it is often documents (e.g. research reports, briefings, articles, or speeches) which are the result of hours of work by an assistant. Assistants regularly collate and process information from a variety of sources (discussed below) into a digestible format, useful for an MEP’s preparations. This might be by producing a document (briefing, speech, or even a report) or by providing a selection of information gathered in a file. Tailored information might be a collection of documents gathered over many weeks relating to a committee or report the office is involved with, an event the office is organising or facilitating, or a campaign the MEP is involved with. Tailored information can also be administered as oral advice, during the morning briefing or a walk-and-talk. Information is tailored in the sense that the assistant provides it after gaining expertise in an area by following the committee and conducting research, but is also constantly aware of the MEP’s ideological and national interests.

6.4.4 The ‘Information Interface’ Mechanism

By performing this role, assistants become powerful hidden actors. Through these core functions, assistants act as an ‘information interface’, interfacing with internal and external knowledge sources. Wodak says there are several knowledge nexuses that structure EP power relations by controlling access; whilst the secretariat stores information about the institution, assistants ‘interface’ at a lower level ‘tailoring its demands and outputs to the specific agenda of the MEP’ and thus gain power by selectively managing information flows (2009:117–8).

It is important to grasp the ‘routine’ role assistants play in shaping the (constant) stream of knowledge which MEPs receive and base their practice of politics inside the EP to some degree upon. It is by fulfilling this role that these hidden actors gain power and can affect individual MEPs’ capacity to exert influence. The capital possessed and strategies employed by an assistant, and their level of competence, can therefore affect an MEP’s success. Preparation helps MEPs to give (more) credible and thus convincing performances, enabling them to exert influence in the habitus and over outcomes (e.g. voting lists). Control of information plays a central role in this. Enormous preparation is required to influence (political) decision-making and being well prepared means having relevant facts, prepared criticisms, interventions, and amendments to set the agenda, shape opinions, and draft documents according to interests (Wodak:2009:46). Assistants play a crucial role in preparing individual MEPs for performances and therefore can affect their capacity to exert influence and play the game successfully.

Whilst EP scholars may have been aware of assistants and that they conduct some of these tasks, their role has remained largely absent from the literature. Discussions with informants suggested that assistants are increasingly playing a policy advisor role and have become increasingly important as (active) MEPs have grown ever busier with the EP’s empowerment. Therefore scholars must now pay attention to these actors and the means through which they exert influence, and what the relevant variables are to further explore variation. Ethnographic immersion has enabled me to explore these hidden actors’ activities and reveal the previously unappreciated extent of their involvement in the EP policy process, but also their ‘routine’ influence in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics. The mundane nature of some of their tasks means they ‘routinely’ shape the constant stream of knowledge individual MEPs receive, digest, and (can) utilise in their performances. However, I stress that assistants’ activities are characterised by a *spectrum* and that the degree to which individual MEPs rely on their assistants varies. MEPs also draw upon other sources; e.g. their constituency office, personal contacts, private meetings and reading, and previous (career) experience. However, the assistants play a routine and sustained role in knowledge management within MEP offices.

6.5 Knowledge Acquisition and Exchange Practices

6.5.1 Assistants’ Sources

Information is not a value-free commodity and sources, formats, and MEPs' preconceptions affect how it is treated, their choices between options, and willingness to accept knowledge (Marcella et al:1999:5-6, Harper:1998, Hull:2012). Information from some actors is disregarded, routinely passed to the MEP, and actively sought from other actors by the assistants. The office works regularly with some interest groups active on the MEP's priority issues who share his preferences. However assistants may 'block' a group if they become too demanding of the office (Belkacem:2013). Assistants can facilitate access to MEPs; respondent-37 stressed the 'importance of informal social networks - meetings can be arranged by assistants or interns between MEPs and third parties which would normally not take place' (Q-19). Exploration of assistants' sources of knowledge reveals which actors are 'routinely' involved in backstage preparations.

As discussed, politicians' need for accurate and reliable information has grown with the complexity of government and parallel increase in quantity and formats. Marcella et al (1999) found that unofficial, informal contacts were considered to be the most important and reliable sources by (UK) MEPs, followed by their own files which are put together by assistants. Most MEPs conduct some of their own research, but none do it all (1999:9-11).

Survey questions 11-12 asked about assistants' information sources and who they work with most often. The responses again mirrored my fieldwork experiences. New assistants may follow leads advised by the MEP, but over time they develop their own networks from which they acquire knowledge. EP assistants interface with a particular range of internal and external, national and transnational, and political and administrative actors, to acquire different types of knowledge for the office. Assistants obtain knowledge most often via email, but oral advice may be acquired by phone. Some assistants also meet face-to-face with officials and interest groups and Belkacem (2013) says there is a preference for face-to-face meetings to avoid confusion over procedures and documents.

Information is often retrieved by assistants from sources close to the office epicentre; e.g. the internet, MEP office, MEP, and EP library (Question-11). In this sense, each office operates as a CoP pursuing its own domain. Outside the office, group policy advisors and the EP secretariat ranked highly and these actors supply political and organisational knowledge. Question-11 also revealed an array of external interest groups from which

assistants acquire knowledge. The sources mentioned reflect the social web discussed in Chapter 5 (Figure 5.1). Sources outside the office were more often mentioned and in more detail by longer serving respondents who had had more time to grow their network. Question-12, exploring which actors assistants work with regularly, found, when combined, nearly 60% of respondents said they often work with external interest groups - NGO's and lobbyists being mentioned most frequently (21%). Assistants sometimes approach interest groups for information, particularly when writing amendments and reports, but often these groups seek them out first, particularly if their MEP is in the 'core' group (Chapter 7, Interviews-36,22, Marshall:2010).

However, perhaps the most interesting finding from the survey is that the most common source of information and advice to assistants is 'other assistants', cited by 52% of respondents, and they remain common sources for longer-serving assistants (Q-11). The survey also illustrates the importance of assistants' co-operation and knowledge exchange with the group secretariat, policy advisors, and NPD assistants who all ranked highly, as well as NPD and group colleagues. The importance of the NPD and group as sources of knowledge and assistance to individual MEP offices reflects my participant observation experiences.

6.5.2 EP Staff

EP officials are a valuable source of knowledge to MEPs because they are often more aware of procedures and cultures than outsiders (Interview-23). An official said that although every report has a rapporteur, each is 'a collaborative effort' between the key MEPs and staff involved, namely group officials, committee advisors, and assistants. These actors collaborate to construct a report and see it through the policy process (Interview-14). Whilst the literature on EP staff is also nascent, they have received more attention than the assistants⁶⁶ (Egeberg et al:2011). Van Schendelen and Scully also indicate that the EP is 'much more than merely' the MEPs: they encourage further research on 'unelected legislators', arguing that rather than subverting democratic processes, their expertise is indispensable (2003:4).

⁶⁶ The literature discusses whether officials' role is technical or political (Winzen:2011), politicisation of the secretariat (Corbett et al:2011:228), what determines level of involvement (Neuhold&Dobbels:2011), and who assists MEPs most (Neunreither:2003, Pegan:2011).

Along with a small number of interest groups⁶⁷, the relevant committee/delegation advisors and group policy advisors were the most frequent recurring visitors to the office, particularly when the MEP was involved with reports. The second assistant, who tended further towards the policy advisor end of the *spectrum*, also met alone with these actors to discuss a report and committee proceedings. When describing how to be effective, the MEP added jovially that you must of course also find the key officials and *have a cup of coffee with them*. The second assistant spent time having coffees with useful EP, committee, and group officials. Like MEPs, assistants weave a (similar) network of relationships, rippling out from the office epicentre, with group and committee officials occupying some of the closest rings. Assistants regularly interface with these sources to download tailored knowledge to the office (Wodak:2009:117-8).

EP officials cannot be analysed as a homogenous group. Scholars have separated them into three categories: the General Secretariat, committee, and group secretariats. The number of EP officials has steadily increased to 6,135 posts in 2011 - 5,273 in the General Secretariat and 862 in group secretariats – and the administration has been restructured to improve its service to MEPs (Corbett et al:2011:218-220).

Figure 6.1: Current structure of the EP Secretariat



(Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00d7a6c2b2/Directorate-General-for-Communication-%28Secretariat%29.html>, last accessed 28/5/2012)

⁶⁷ Diana Wallis MEP stated that MEPs 'need' interest groups to do their job because they provide expertise quickly (3/11/2011, Rasmussen:2013).

The General Secretariat has three types of direct assistance to MEPs: the Legal Service, DG Internal Policies (IPOL), and DG External Policies (EXPO). The remaining DGs ensure the smooth running of the institution; only two respondents said they worked with the secretariat (Question-12). The only DG's the office had contact with were Personnel and Finances intermittently, and these interactions were experienced as extremely bureaucratic, so the MEP had identified particular individuals to work with (also Chapter 5).

The committee secretariats – in IPOL and EXPO – are the most relevant DG's to MEPs' everyday practice of politics. They ensure the smooth running of committees through organisation and briefing. They are smaller than their US Congress counterparts, with 4-10 staff depending on work-load and tend to be generalists within the area (Corbett et al:2011:151,223-5). The assistants regularly work with these actors (Q-12). The MEP's second assistant regularly emailed the committee/delegation advisors to acquire organisational and expert knowledge (about procedures and developments) and engaged in informal discussions with them when they visited. However interviews suggested that these actors may also be involved in more political discussions with key MEPs such as committee chairs and rapporteurs (Interviews-12,21,23,51). Scholars have found the scope of their work is defined inter-subjectively by rapporteurs (Winzen:2011, Neuhold&Dobbels:2012). Indeed the MEP chose to engage with officials differently on two reports. During the first, the committee official dealt with the amendments, research, and organised shadows meetings. However the second assistant was involved with these tasks during the second report. This supports the idea that the skills and ambitions of assistants affect how individual MEPs practice politics here. Neunreither (2003:49) suggests committee officials' role assisting MEPs has declined since the 1990's as more sources have become available. An official said, 'when it comes to members, a lot of factors can come into play, including who their advisors are in their office, how they use you and support from the externals' (Interview-51).

Corbett et al suggest MEPs are increasingly turning to political sources - group secretariats and their assistants – rather than the General Secretariat (2011:228-30), a notion supported by anecdotal evidence which deserves further systematic investigation. Indeed the survey showed assistants most commonly work with their group secretariat (27%) and policy advisors ranked highly in Questions 11-12 - again reflecting my fieldwork experiences of the assistants' regular interactions (by phone, email, and face-to-face) with group officials.

An MEP said, ‘the policy advisors are the most useful to an MEP who wants to get something done’ (Interview-18). The group secretariats have a partisan mandate and are overtly political (Winzen:2011:15) but have remained virtually un-studied by academics (Pegan:2011). Officials are allocated according to group size, groups having currently 46-264 officials (Corbett et al:2011:78).

My interviews suggested the group secretariat plays three roles. Firstly, the Leader’s Office assists the leader and co-ordinates the group politically to ensure consistency and coherence (see Chapter 7). Secondly, the Parliamentary Work Unit provides support to committee members, providing expert and political knowledge by following the committees and offering strategic advice. Advisors in the larger groups are able to specialise further (Interview-50). Policy advisors also meet regularly with advisors from other groups (Interview-33). Thirdly, secretarial staff organise the smooth running and ‘life’ of the group such as meetings, events, and parties. The assistants regularly sought political knowledge from the policy advisors and administrative support (organisational knowledge) particularly for events, from secretarial staff. Some officials had worked for the group for many years, particularly in secretarial roles, whereas policy advisors tended to be younger and some had recently previously been assistants (Interviews-14,22,33,34,47,49).

6.5.3 Social and Communication Practices

Over time, assistants can also weave a dense web of contacts through their knowledge management role. However, as stated, ‘other assistants’ were found to be their most common source of information. NPD assistants also ranked highly as people assistants work with, along with the group secretariat and policy advisors – as well as NPD and group colleagues. As discussed in Chapter 5, the group and particularly the NPD acts as assistants’ and therefore MEP offices’ *first port of call* for support, particularly in areas on which the office does not focus. NPD assistants regularly pop into each others’ offices for formal and informal discussions and call and email each other on a daily basis (Belkacem:2013) and a strong *esprit de corps* exists among them (Shore:2000:164).

NPD assistants play a key role in socialising newcomers into the habitus; ‘there’s no official training ... I also talked to other staff along our corridor if I didn’t know the answer to something ... its informal training where you talk to other people’ (Interview-3). Nearly a

third of respondents said they received no training, others citing learning on the job (19%) and from the MEP's staff (10%), whilst only 6% listed formal training (Q-9). Some assistants said you have to have a lot of *initiative* here to do well. Since the Statute, the assistants have been entitled to training but the first course in 2010 focused on EU history and attendees complained there was a lack of practical information; e.g. advice on procedures and writing amendments. Like other NPD newcomers, I was trained by the MEP's assistant and subsequently made a welcome-pack for and introduced the second assistant to procedures and practices.

As well as advising me to call the other NPD offices, the first assistant stressed the importance of the weekly NPD assistants' meetings to keep up with all the EP's initiatives and debates. The NPD assistants socialise new members into the CoP's practices and expectations of the habitus. Whilst my own experience was pleasant, this is probably unlikely to be universal; 'you can ask particular things to your (direct) colleagues, but for the rest it is up to you to find out how the EP works - because colleagues see you as competitors' (Respondent-11, Q-11). There is a sense of competition among assistants and stagiaires, heightened when posts with MEPs and groups become available. However co-operation among the NPD assistants is vital⁶⁸, and they recognised this by throwing a barbecue for the post-recess newcomers in September to help everyone get to know each other.

The NPD's assistants spend a lot of time together socially, and the boundaries of inside-outside of work blur among them, particularly when socialising in their work clothes. Whilst they might vent some frustrations, they display a high degree of loyalty to their MEP and office; assistants exhibit dramaturgical loyalty, adhering to a moral obligation to protect their show (Branaman:1997:lxvi). Some assistants humorously identify themselves as their MEP's *Team* and they are 'a little collection of people with mutual gaze and focus' (Manning:2008:680).

The NPD assistants meet regularly for lunch, particularly on Fridays and in constituency *weeks*, and have a *spot* in the canteen so they can find each other. Another assistant also said;

⁶⁸ For example, an assistant was irritated with another because her MEP wanted the NPD to support a mini-plenary vote, but an MEP had a medical appointment and could not attend which his assistant would not move.

‘we have a canteen for lunch, and people go and stay in their groups ... Greens are in the Greens/EFA group which includes Plaid Cymru, so we were quite good friends with them because we were in the same group, and when we went to group and committee meetings they were there, so were lots of other people but we recognised them’ (Interview-2).

Regularly on Tuesday or Wednesdays they meet for *event hopping* and to attend *good* events (e.g. the annual Google event), meaning those with the best catering, freebies, and/or entertainment. An assistant said you can drink champagne and eat canapés every night in Brussels but many people tire of this diet because of the obligatory networking and repetitive conversations. Although *after work*, these events are often in or around Espace Léopold. EP assistants gather routinely on Place Lux(embourg) on Thursday evenings to drink and review the week’s events (Photos-5). Although sometimes people suggest work topics should be banned, being their common frame of reference, they frequently creep up. Lines between socialising and networking are particularly blurry in these spaces as business cards are commonly exchanged and interest groups mingle with assistants and officials. Often the first question is which MEP or group do you work for. The groups tend to frequent different establishments on Place Lux or rarely mix inside them (Interviews-5,6).

The NPD assistants also socialise regularly at the weekends, in the evenings (Appendix-5), and by making trips to nearby cities said to be part of the privilege of this post. Work is discussed less, but conversations instead often turn to career plans, home, and the Brussels experience. Rozanska (2011:275) highlights the encapsulating role of networking in Brussels. Her informants said their social life was shrinking to colleagues met through the institutions, due to time limitations and fatigue from long hours. However some assistants said they did not socialise with their NPDs and groups so much because they were older (Interview-2,25).

The NPD assistants routinely interact informally inside the EP due to the spatial arrangement of the MEP offices (see pp.161), in a small office they share, and at the sides of and during the long walks back from group *week* group and NPD meetings and events. Belkacem (2013) found NPD assistants’ informal interaction is further encouraged by having coffee machines in their offices, around which informal chats often quickly turn to work topics. The groups’ assistants often also work closely in committees, discuss amendments, and meet routinely in committee *prep* meetings. An MEP said, ‘groups do help, because political assistants talk together, a lot, which is quite good, because sometimes it’s an informal way of finding out views’ (Interview-45). Assistants sometimes

work with their counterparts from other groups in committees on reports and perhaps meet to discuss amendments, but these exchanges are more formal and work-focused.

Routine knowledge exchange between the NPD assistants is facilitated by the more formal Friday meetings, which are also conducted by (larger) NPDs in other groups. Every Friday, once the MEPs have departed, the NPD assistants go around a circle and update each other on progress in their committees and other activities so they can keep abreast of developments and *controversial* issues (Chapter 7). They exchange resources such as standard letters for constituents, as CoPs share resources, experiences, and tools and ways of addressing common problems (Wodak:2009:14, Wenger et al:2002). Whilst knowledge exchange and acquisition are facilitated by this more formal mechanism, assistants also regularly exchange knowledge informally by phone, email, and at events – through their routine communication and social practices. Like all CoPs they do this because they find (added) value in these interactions and exchanges because they share a common domain, and sharing knowledge through their practice helps individual MEPs and their offices to cope with the work environment they face and practice politics more successfully. An MEP said she arranged a meeting with her shadow rapporteur's assistant when she wanted further information about a report because 'he's the one who supports her on legal affairs' (Interview-52). Meanwhile an assistant said, 'it would be impossible to function if you weren't in a group... the legislation is so complicated – you can't know everything about every little bit. You'd just drown' (Interview-3) and alternatively an NI assistant said 'the work for an assistant, it's nice, if you're in a group, if you have support' (Interview-55).

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has further explored the role assistants play in MEP's everyday practice of politics, by exploring their activities and knowledge management practices. I have argued that assistants act as 'information interfaces' within the office, to help MEPs cope with the work environment they face and practice politics more successfully. MEPs' employment of assistants as knowledge managers is an everyday strategy employed to help them create order and pursue their aims and interests more successfully within the habitus. MEPs' employment of assistants and subsequently an assistant's level of competence, amount of capital, and the strategies they employ, can affect an MEP's capacity to exert influence and ability to play the game. Scholars should pay more attention to the role of hidden actors

inside EU institutions (Ripoll Servent&Busby:2013) who are ‘making Europe’ (Jenson&Mérand:2010:74-6), and particularly the EP assistants who are deeply involved in the legislative process. Further research would also be useful on the resources and reproduction of this elite social group (see pp.230 and Schnabel:2002, 1998).

The following findings have been presented. EP assistants play a vital backstage role due to the particular transnational work environment MEPs face which means they are frequently absent from Brussels and which is characterised by *information overload*. The assistants are MEPs’ *eyes and ears* whilst they are absent, and are trusted to *spot* important developments. Assistants carry out a range of tasks and a high level of multi-tasking is expected of them. Their activities help to prepare MEPs for performances. However a *spectrum* characterises assistants’ activities: some act as policy advisors conducting more prestigious tasks whereas others perform a more secretarial function, depending on their own skills and their MEPs’ wishes. However all assistants carry out some mundane office tasks, acting as ‘information interfaces’ within the office. They gate-keep their MEP’s *precious* time, filter the information overload, and provide further tailored knowledge to help their MEP pursue their chosen issues. Assistants regularly interface with a range of internal and external actors to acquire knowledge. Through this practice, they build their own network. Assistants work hard, and the contacts and experience they acquire help them to build and pursue their own careers, and we should therefore approach them as individuals on a career trajectory.

Whilst assistants can weave an extensive network, they routinely interact and exchange knowledge with their trusted NPD and group colleagues. Their fellow NPD assistants act as their *first port of call* in areas on which their own office does not focus. Knowledge exchange is facilitated by the more formal Friday NPD assistants’ meeting, but they also communicate regularly through a variety of informal practices. These practices reinforce the important role the NPD and group structures play in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics, where they act as supportive knowledge sharing CoPs, a role which is further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 7:

The Political Group: a community of practice

‘There are relations of trust created within the group, where they dare to follow someone who they trust without knowing themselves the substance of the issue’
(Interview-57)

‘I have no other possibility than to go along with my party. I have no bad consciousness. Sometimes I am voting on something that I absolutely don’t know, I didn’t have time to participate in the debate – everything is debated, every report, every decision. So I have very high respect for our specialists for our different areas, you cannot, it is too much, so you have to go along with your group’
(Interview-43)

‘Without experts, groups ... would be quite limited in their ability to determine a party position concerning every single legislative proposal ... the PPC dynamic, however, provides solutions to the problems of limited resources for both party leaderships and individual MEPs, and for the party leaderships’ incapacity to enforce discipline’
(Ringe:2010:42).

7.1 “My MEP follows the voting list, unless it is a controversial issue”

In July, I travelled to Strasbourg with an assistant from the MEP’s group. We chatted about what I could expect from my first Strasbourg session and, for part of the journey, my research. I explained that I was interested in exploring how individual MEPs decide how to vote and in understanding how the groups achieve their surprising levels of cohesion (Chapter 1, Ringe:2010:1-5). The assistant laughed and said, *I can give you a very simple answer to that question, my MEP follows the voting list, unless it is a controversial issue.*

He said it is impossible for any MEP to know all the detail of all the technical dossiers and hundreds of amendments voted on in each plenary *week*. Therefore, of course MEPs follow the voting list which indicates the group line, or follow the hand signals given by the group’s rapporteur or shadow. This is perhaps more the case for his MEP than some others because they belong to a small NPD whose members cannot cover all the committees. His MEP often follows the voting list, *unless it is a controversial issue*, meaning the vote concerns a report which has implications for their member state or is a salient piece of legislation, in which case his MEP would be more informed about the issue anyway or would seek further information to make an independent decision. MEPs are free to do so because they ‘exercise their mandate independently. They shall not be bound by any instructions and shall not receive a binding mandate’ (EP 2010, Rule 2). The assistant advised me to watch a Strasbourg voting session where I would see the groups raising their hands in unison and the rapporteurs and shadows giving hand signals to their colleagues.

I later did observe the voting rituals which occur in hour-long sessions in Strasbourg, where you can often observe the groups raising their hands in unison as the chair rhythmically calls out the dossier and *for, against, abstentions* repeatedly. Immersion in the field revealed the backstage routine which produces the group's voting lists and I explored the role these transnational structures play in MEPs' everyday practice of politics.

7.2 Introduction

Chapters 4-5 explored the context in which MEPs practice politics and the circumstances in which they make decisions. Chapter 6 explored the role of assistants in helping MEPs to cope with this work environment. This chapter builds on these findings and explores the role of the group in individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics inside the EP. I argue that conceptualising the group as a CoP can help us gain a deeper understanding of the role this structure plays in individual MEPs' daily endeavour. Using ethnography to build on Ringe's (2010) work, this chapter finds that routine knowledge exchange between group experts and non-experts helps MEPs to cope, focus on strategically pursuing their interests, and the CoP to pursue its domain. This chapter explores the group voting list construction process and MEPs' dynamic interactions with these structures and with each other, as part of this routine. The chapter pursues the narrative woven so far, that the group and NPD play a crucial support role as individual MEPs' *first port of call* in areas on which they do not focus on a daily basis. By exploring the role of the group from an individual MEP's perspective and taking a more holistic approach, this chapter is also able to present a deeper understanding of how cohesion is achieved.

Regarding the research question, this chapter explores the role of the group in individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics inside the EP. Regarding the research issues, it focuses on how individual MEPs decide how to vote within the constraints they face. Regarding the theoretical framework, I conceptualise the group as a knowledge sharing CoP. Section 1 explores the backstage voting list construction routine. It finds the strict structuring of time in the EP facilitates and reinforces the information-sharing dynamic Ringe identifies, and further explores the types of capital possessed by group 'experts'. Section 2 explores the role of the NPDs in this dynamic, where the national perspective is routinely considered and controversial issues are raised. It also explores defection as strategy and cohesion as a

type of capital required for actors to be taken *seriously*. Section 3 explores the group's development of a shared practice and history.

7.3 The Achievement of Group Cohesion

7.3.1 Group Cohesion

As discussed in Chapter 1, the first generation of MEP research found that the EP should be approached as a 'normal' legislature and that the group and NPD are the best predictors of plenary behaviour. RCV analysis has found that despite high heterogeneity, EP politics has become increasingly structured, the groups have become increasingly cohesive, and that voting occurs primarily along ideological lines (see Yordanova:2011, Ringe:2010:1-5). Hix et al (2007) argue that the groups discipline their MEPs, via the NPDs, to achieve the observed levels of cohesion. However the research takes a narrow approach to 'politics' and has focused on explaining outcomes to the detriment of understanding processes, and has not investigated how cohesion is achieved at the everyday level.

More work is needed to understand the mechanisms through which the tripartite relationships between MEPs, groups, and NPDs work (Coman:2009). Ringe (2010) dismisses the discipline thesis as problematic theoretically due to the groups' structural weaknesses and because disciplining deviating MEPs is empirically 'unheard of' (2010:4,27,56). Senior group officials also told me, 'you can't really do anything. You can get very cross ... but we have no tools' (Interview-47) and that 'the only force, the influence we have on individuals' voting behaviour is to convince them'⁶⁹ (Interview-57). The 'whip' is not the same as the national-level role and there is no equivalent to the UK's three-line whip; whipping in a national sense does not work because there are 'various influences' on MEPs which 'all have to be reconciled at European level' (Interview-49).

By investigating cohesion by exploring how individual MEPs decide how to vote, Ringe (2010) found that EP politics revolves around information, resource limitations, and expertise. He argues non-expert MEPs follow their group's committee experts with whom they share Perceived Preference Coherence (PPC). I build on Ringe's findings by using

⁶⁹ Some groups have considered removing speaking time but MEPs have opposed this because it could be used against them at some point (Interviews-47,8).

ethnography to explore the role of the group more holistically in individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics. An inductive approach is important because:

‘... we had to fight for a long time with concepts of political parties ... Every researcher into political parties, European parties, based themselves on ideas from 1957 instead of looking what other conditions are happening on a European level. These concepts are getting dusty, but they just carry on’ (Interview-26).

7.3.2 Constructing Voting Lists

Group cohesion in plenary *week* is achieved by a backstage routine which produces voting lists. Abélès insists, ‘when we speak about group discipline, the most indispensable element for making an institution work, it must be understood that it is never something natural or automatic’ (1993:10-11) – but is instead the result of weeks of backstage preparation and negotiations.

7.3.2.1 The EP Calendar

Exploring decision-making by and from the perspective of an individual MEP reveals a more nuanced understanding of cohesion. We first return to the EP calendar (Appendix-8), this ubiquitous artefact, because understanding the structuring of time here shows the circumstances and constraints in which MEPs make decisions.

Committee week > Group week > Plenary week > (Constituency week)
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Exploring the routines which constitute the daily life of this institution shows how cohesion is facilitated. We may find our daily routines embarrassingly uninteresting, but they express the wider social order (Inglis:2005:3). Ringe’s PPC dynamic is facilitated and reinforced by the strict structuring of time in the EP. EP *weeks* follow a regular pattern: committee, group, plenary, constituency and this organisational knowledge is taken-for-granted by participants (Schatzberg:2008). MEPs organise their time around the calendar. As described, the MEP focuses on a narrow range of technical issues through the activities he undertakes in committee *weeks* – through which he acquires knowledge and develops expertise (Chapter 5). This expertise is then shared with NPD and group colleagues in the following group *week* where the MEP updates these colleagues on developments in exchange for the same knowledge on their specialist areas. This routine exchange prepares

the MEP for the following plenary *week*. This structuring of time facilitates knowledge exchange within the groups, and ensures the (transnational ideological) group and (legislative) committee roles are able to be routinely performed. The order means expertise is acquired by MEPs in committee *weeks* and then shared with non-experts in group *weeks* ready for plenary *week*:

‘...you can’t be a specialist in all the subjects, so you have to rely heavily on the rapporteur to do their job and hope that they actually know what they are talking about. Therefore you do rely a lot on the group ... on a lot of the technical stuff’ (Interview-28).

7.3.2.2 Committee Prep

Ringe hypothesises that committee experts usually assume a common position because then they are more likely to see their preferences approximated in committee and their position adopted by the group (2010:6,41). Committee members’ positions constitute ‘potent predictors’ of group voting (2010:64-75). The MEP (or his assistant) meets committee colleagues in *prep* before committee to discuss their position. In these co-ordinator led meetings, (expert and political) knowledge is exchanged and they may try to develop a ‘common vision’ for the group in the committee (Interview-34). The coordinator ‘has a role in terms of rallying the majority of the group’s MEPs in that committee’ (Interview-49). Through these meetings, the committee-based expertise acquired by MEPs is strategically built into groups’ (normal) decision-making process as group colleagues prepare for group as well as committee:

‘... your first job is to get your fellow ALDE people, on your committee, on board. Then the wider group discussion will take place in the context of the plenary’ (Interview-29)

‘MEPs of the same committee come together and compromise and agree. Without [prep] they can’t go to the plenary or committee and vote, it would be messy’ (Interview-7)

‘...the committees are actually relatively effective at keeping hold of the outcome of their work ... By the time it gets to the group, group leaders may well have no idea about the subject and have to join a train that has well and truly left the station’ (Interview-35).

7.3.2.3 Group Week

Group *week* is a crucial phase of the EP’s monthly cycle as this is when voting lines are ‘hammered out’ (Interview-6). Group *weeks* consist of the meeting routine outlined below.

If the MEP cannot attend any meetings, the assistants cover them. In plenary *week*, the group bureau precedes the group meeting (also known as group plenary):

NPD > Working Group > (Group Bureau) > Group Plenary
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This structuring of activity in group *week* acts as ‘an early warning system’ for the group leader and secretariat (Interview-47). This particular order guides, or filters, the group towards a voting line on which most MEPs can agree, and therefore facilitates cohesion. By group plenary, the leader and secretariat have a good understanding of the fault-lines in the group and reports where it may be difficult to find a line consensually. However, they are aware of the issues which are likely to be controversial much further in advance, perhaps 3-6 months, due to feedback from policy advisors, co-ordinators, and (shadow) rapporteurs, and may schedule an orientation debate in group plenary earlier in the legislative process to assess where the fault-lines lie (Interviews-49,53). The secretariat is often involved in ‘pre-cooking’ before group plenary (Interview-35) and an official said, ‘we wouldn’t just go into the group “chancing it” on important issues’ (Interview-47).

In group (and mini-plenary) *weeks*, the MEP usually first meets with his NPD colleagues and they update each other on their committee work and *controversial issues* arising for the next plenary. The NPD also meets for breakfast in committee *weeks* to constantly keep knowledge flowing and the CoP abreast of relevant developments. Membership of the CoP means MEPs know what issues will be interesting for fellow members, and this is usually issues which may be *controversial* in the member state (Section-2) as EP politics is not completely de-territorialised (Ringe:2010:1-6). If a conclusion is not reached or the NPD decides to defect, they take this to the working groups and bureau: ‘they decide as a national delegation then they go to the group meeting and present this’ (Interview-7).

Working groups, for the three largest groups, thematically cluster the EP’s committees⁷⁰. For smaller groups this system does not work because there would not be enough MEPs to establish a group line (Interview-49). Working groups are used to ‘clean’ technical issues which are not controversial and are ‘tabled’ on behalf of the group (Interview-53): ‘the most relevant MEPs thrash out the most technical differences ... before bringing their recommendations to the group’ (Interview-49). However working groups are open to all of

⁷⁰ They sometimes meet together if there is little business.

the group's MEPs and they may attend to raise controversial issues or seek clarification. If consensus on a voting line cannot be reached, then the issue is taken to group plenary for debate. Decisions reached in the working groups cannot be re-opened in group plenary and the chair decides whether an issue will be passed to group plenary. An official commented that sometimes MEPs can seem to forget the working groups have a mandate to decide on behalf of the group, so that enough group time can be kept for 'controversies and problematic things' to be discussed (Interview-53).

In Strasbourg, the group bureau meets directly before group plenary⁷¹. They discuss 'horizontal issues' such as office allocations, enlargement, political events, and election preparations (Interview-53). It is another site in which NPDs can routinely raise controversial issues which mean their MEPs face role tensions. An NPD leader said it is easier to change the group's direction here because 'what you are saying has a greater effect because it's not nice to have small group disagreements, so that's how I use the bureau, to make it clear that this is our red line' (Interview-42). Because there are less people, the discussions are deeper but often also 'more strained' (Interview-39). The bureau is a useful tool for the leader so he doesn't 'lose face... it's a question of his liability, his reputation. It's better that we have the discussion, and his draft has not been rejected in front of the whole group' (Interview-42). By group plenary, the leader and secretariat know for which reports it may be difficult to reach consensus. The final vote produces the group line and the secretariat puts the voting lists on the intranet for MEPs to download (Interview-58). It is usually clear in group *week* how the votes will go but occasionally there can be surprises when they see what amendments other groups have tabled (Interview-53).

The particular order of the meetings which constitute group *week* enables individual and territory-based concerns to be raised and discussed before and during the group meeting. These meetings ensure information is shared at an early stage so MEPs can flag controversial issues so they can check with their national party before decisions are made in the group. This routine facilitates the construction of voting lists in which MEPs have a high degree of trust have been informed by competent expert colleagues with whom they share PPC and that through the institutionalisation of this routine, they will have been alerted to any controversy. The strict structuring of time in the EP therefore facilitates and

⁷¹ The precise composition of the bureau varies between the groups.

reinforces the information-sharing dynamic Ringe (2010) identifies, and is conducive to group cohesion.

7.3.3 The Core Group

Discipline is not automatic and within the confines of the meeting routine, expert MEPs must give credible performances to convince non-experts to follow their recommendations: ‘to a certain extent trust your colleagues but you have to listen to what they are saying’ (Interview-52). MEPs are able to influence group plenary debates depending on the credibility of their performances and capital they possess: ‘a lot depends on who is the one proposing a group line - do members trust that member?’ (Interview-57).

Ringe (2010:89-107) differentiates between ‘indifferent’ and ‘invested’ MEPs who seek reassurance from committee experts. Immersion nuanced this dynamic further. Rather than the committee experts, a smaller *core group* of MEPs routinely influences the group line:

‘obviously when it’s a committee I am involved in ... I know my stuff. For other committees, for other votes how do I decide? For number one, I will go to the group meeting ... I would then look to see who was giving that advice within the group, because there are people that I would say yes, that person would be sound on something, or I’ve got to check that because I know how they think, it doesn’t mean it’s wrong, it just means that I might not agree’ (Interview-27).

Group plenary proceedings follow a pattern which facilitates the transfer of knowledge between experts and non-experts and the (routine) influence of a *core group* in debates and over outcomes (i.e. voting lists). Agendas consist of reports which have not been resolved in the working groups and issues requested by MEPs (Interview-53). Proceedings consist of an opening by the leader, speeches on each item followed by debates, votes (in Strasbourg), and then closing remarks by the leader.

The *core group* steers debates through the speaking routines which group plenary consists of. They raise unresolved issues, open questions, and issues which interest their colleagues who share a common domain. Each item is introduced by the rapporteur or shadow, or the co-ordinator in their absence. They set the scope and tone of the debate and raise the issues which usually dominate the following debate. Committee chairs and co-ordinators may also give updates on upcoming plenary issues and therefore also speak routinely. Afterwards the floor is opened for debate. MEPs often thank the (shadow) rapporteur and

then the discussion focuses on the issues raised. Ringe's 'invested' non-expert MEPs and committee experts frequently dominate. Hence it is crucial for MEPs to be prepared with relevant facts and criticisms to set the agenda and shape opinions (Wodak:2009:114). The chair (usually the leader) closes and summarises each item as well as the meeting: 'he can see which way the group is leaning ... he has to wrap up the debate and invite the group to make a decision. So it is usually up to him to propose in his concluding remarks the group position' (Interview-49). This structure means a *core group* sets the scope of debates, summarises, and provides the knowledge non-expert MEPs are routinely presented with to make decisions.

(Shadow)Rapporteur > Co-ordinator > Committee Chair > Specialists > Group Leader
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The *core group* consists of three types of MEPs who have accumulated and possess valid capital (Chapter 3). The first type is MEPs holding particular formal offices which enable them to accumulate expert and political knowledge: 'I cannot myself read all this stuff ... I simply trust the shadow rapporteurs or the coordinators of our political group' (Interview-37). Rapporteurs guide a report through the EP's complex legislative process, writing or amending the text and speaking on its behalf in committee and plenary (Corbett et al:2011:157). They are likely to be approached by and meet many interest groups (Interview-45), work closely with committee advisors (Interview-12,51), and meet Commission desk officers. Shadows often attend meetings with the rapporteur. An assistant said, 'there's a sense of respect among the MEPs for the rapporteurs because they know how much work they have put in, and since they also have a lot of other work to do, they often trust their judgement' (Interview-3). However for less active MEPs or first time (shadow) rapporteurs, it may be more difficult for them to convince the group and they may need the coordinator to back them up, for additional credibility (Interview-57).

Committee co-ordinators are also perceived to possess expertise; they organise committee activity, are expected to have a broad knowledge of proceedings and issues, and meet with co-ordinators from other groups (Interviews-31,41,44, Chapter 8). Co-ordinators are 'supposed to have a horizontal view on what's happening within the committee, any issues, but also what is going on with the other groups. So a debate on a given issue is not only on the substance, but also on the context of the other groups' (Interview-57). Committee chairs also regularly inform debates because they have a deep knowledge of the work of

their committee and attend committee bureau, the Conference of Committee Chairs, and receive additional support from the committee secretariat.

A second type is MEPs possessing reputations as specialists, gained either in the EP or from previous career experience, even when they do not hold a relevant formal office. When asked who they thought was influential in their group, interviewees repeatedly named a small group of individuals as well as the aforementioned offices: ‘foreign policy and institutions, I would say that everybody listens very carefully when [MEP] is speaking, because of his knowledge’ (Interview-42). The transience of the MEP population means that knowledge gained in one term is an important form of capital for those who return.

The third type is the group leader who attends the Conference of Presidents and is regularly advised by the politically mandated group secretariat. The leader possesses and presents political knowledge in addition to MEPs’ (legislative) expert knowledge (Interview-34). The leader may advise the group on potential implications of a vote for the group’s reputation in the EP and ‘for specific dossiers the group leadership is important ... for the big picture issues’ (Interview-26). Some leaders ‘push’ groups towards compromises more than others, depending on their personality, previous (political) experience, and own agenda and ambitions (Interview-47, see Chapter 8).

Whilst the structure of group meetings presents the potential for the *core group* to routinely influence voting lines, this is not automatic and depends on the performance an individual gives, and whether they present a credible self which is publicly validated: ‘I wouldn’t say MEPs are always swayed by a group discussion. The group debates, sometimes, just serve to highlight differences’ (Interview-49). You have ‘a mixture’ of functions and personalities (Interview-44) and an MEP said, ‘I know when some people speak, that they will make really sensible, good points and some people will make points that are a bit “meh”’ (Interview-52). Committee experts have to ‘be persuasive enough in their group about the value of the report’ and even ‘pedagogical’ to build a majority (Interview-47). As an MEP explained, ‘it’s too easy to ... write a good justification for an amendment ... hope that will carry the day, but you do need to explain things and build up a rapport’ (Interview-41). Credible performances depend on the possession of desirable attributes as well as structural resources: a view ‘can be hampered because the main speaker presents in such an unpleasant manner’ (Interview-57). Hence MEPs’ acquisition of the *habitus* and feel for the

game as well as their backstage preparations and accumulation of capital are vital for success. As an official explained:

‘there is also a bit about presentation style, body language, voice, some people are more gifted with speaking skills than others ... so when you look at the group member who is giving advice you look at how they are presenting their case ... This is an additional cue for a chair because you see how people react on what's presented, you see if it will go through easily’ (Interview-57).

7.3.4 Following the Voting List

This routine produces the voting lists downloaded by MEPs from the intranet (Interview-58). Policy advisors and shadows indicate the group and rapporteur’s position and split votes (Interview-53). MEPs take the lists and votes are conducted in hour-long highly ritualised sessions in Strasbourg. MEPs vote continuously on reports and hundreds of amendments as the chair calls out rhythmically *‘for, against, abstentions’*. MEPs raise their hands continuously and votes are separated from debates. Pauses only occur if MEPs protest against the chair’s judgement and for RCVs.

In July, an S&D co-ordinator stood up and alerted MEPs to a mistake on their list, which was greeted with audible grumbling, and then an EPP co-ordinator confirmed their list. This demonstrates the trust (many) MEPs have in the lists, constructed by CoPs which are based on mutual respect and trust (Wenger et al:2002:1-21). MEPs ‘normally’ follow the list not because of threatened disciplinary action (Ringe:2010:8), but because they are resource short, focus on their committee(s), and cannot know how to vote on every technical amendment, so trust that the dynamic construction process described will have been informed by experts with whom they share PPC and have highlighted any controversy. Following the list is therefore common-sense (Schatzberg:2008). Interviewees stressed that trust in the competence of your colleagues is a fundamental part of EP politics (Interviews-28,47,57, see also Ringe:2010:54 and Whitaker:2005).

It is impossible for politicians to be experts in all the areas on which they make important decisions (Marcella et al:1999:6). Wodak (2009:64) says the everyday life of politicians requires ad hoc decision-making, which is revealed when we explore their daily activities. Routine knowledge exchange between experts and non-experts in the groups helps individual MEPs to make decisions, to cope with this work context and to focus on

strategically pursuing their chosen interests, and also produces cohesion. This dynamic was described in almost identical terms by numerous interviewees (also Interviews-7,27,28,43,52):

‘...one week in Strasbourg, there were 700 separate votes, how can any individual really know on all those issues where they're going? You have to follow a whip. We have this thumbs up and thumbs down system’ (Interview-48)

‘sometimes people don’t agree with the shadow or rapporteur but you can’t know everything, so you have to trust your colleagues to a large extent, because it is impossible to know what is going on in two committees, never mind all of them’ (Interview-52)

‘... there are lots of things one MEP doesn’t have the capacity to find out, like whether tomato extract is a good idea. One MEP can’t form an opinion on that. If it’s something very controversial they think through it ... That’s the advantage of being part of a group’ (Interview-3)

‘they really concentrate on a few issues which are really key for them and their constituency. For the rest they normally follow the shadow, the leader, the voting list’ (Interview-53)

‘...when the parliament starts after elections, most new MEPs don't know how to vote, so you will see a natural tendency of people looking for themselves ... until they find the, let’s say, coordinator is basically the same as they feel, therefore they can follow their recommendations’⁷² (Interview-57).

7.4 The NPDs: negotiating multiple roles

The NPDs play an important role in this dynamic. Their meetings are the location where the national perspective is routinely considered. It is in NPD meetings that MEPs routinely negotiate their multiple roles, particularly when controversial issues bring these to the fore.

7.4.1 NPD Meetings and Controversial Issues

The calendar does not institutionalise member-state meetings. MEPs may interact with member-state colleagues informally (e.g. in committees, inter-groups, or at Permanent Representation events) but the lack of formal routine interaction, firstly, reinforces the role of the groups and, secondly, means NPD meetings are the site in which the national perspective is routinely considered.

⁷² It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the 2004 and 2007 enlargements have had no negative effect on cohesion (Yordanova:2011:608).

The MEP meets his NPD colleagues in committee, group, and plenary *weeks* (Appendix-11). They sit in a hemicycle and, chaired by the NPD leader, take turns to update each other on their committee work, in group *weeks* particularly focusing on reports and amendments for the upcoming plenary *week*. Most of the NPD's assistants attend to keep abreast of broader developments outside of their committee work. If the MEP cannot attend then an assistant covers this meeting. The NPD meeting is 'very important for exchanging information' (Interview-32). Here knowledge is exchanged between trusted colleagues who share PPC but also territorial interests. Again this community meets regularly because they find value in sharing information, because they care about a common domain, and these regular interactions based on mutual respect and trust help them to survive the work environment. Sharing a common domain means members of this CoP know what is interesting to fellow members, worth sharing, and how to present it. This practice allows them to proceed more efficiently (see Chapter 3). MEPs and their assistants follow their committee(s) and know which issues to bring to fellow CoP members' attention. As an NI assistant said, 'they have a start ... the assistants know of course and understand things from a national point of view, and are aware of personal sensitivity for the MEP, which means that they know where they have to check. If not then they just trust on the voting list' (Interview-56).

The national perspective is routinely acknowledged as members discuss their work, often in detail, and highlight aspects with reference to the national party, media, and constituents' interests and potential reaction, and with reference to the direction the group is taking (as discussed in *prep* and with policy advisors) and whether they or the whole NPD may want to defect: 'we have a delegation meeting where I present anything that's controversial, although most of it is just everyday stuff. I present it and then we talk amongst ourselves' (Interview-45).

These meetings are particularly important for NPDs whose party is in government at home, to ensure they are voting consistently so this cannot be used by the media to embarrass their leader:

'... the national delegation is quite important for us as we are now in government, we realise that people might notice or might comment. We've got more of a responsibility I think, than we had before' (Interview-29)

‘As [my party] is in government right now they try to influence us and ask us not to hinder their work, and not to make their life more difficult’ (Interview-31)

‘If we vote against their position at home we have to discuss it, and make it clear that we are doing this for our home advantage. Sometimes you have to do it, to move something’ (Interview-42).

National parties may also contact the group secretariat directly (Interview-47). The importance of these meetings also varies depending on the electoral system: ‘you have to think of the repercussions ... I’ve heard colleagues who come from open list systems saying “I can’t vote in favour of this as my voters would never accept that”’ (Interview-52). As discussed in Chapter 4, MEPs perceive themselves to have a lot of freedom in the *bubble* to pursue their chosen interests because national parties and medias are rarely interested in their activities until there is a ‘critical’ vote⁷³, and then ‘Prime ministers, even, calling on the phone or the minister of X or Y’ (Interview-47).

In these meetings, which are part of the group *week* routine, the MEP and his NPD colleagues negotiate their multiple roles by discussing the impact of legislation on the member-state and/or regions. In this way, the MEP navigates the complex nexus of roles he is suspended within and is also able to focus on pursuing his policy interests, because he can follow the list for reports where controversial issues are not raised by these trusted colleagues or the assistants. MEPs compromise and agree in *prep* meetings and then ‘the national delegation will just be informed, unless it is something very sensitive nationally’ (Interview-7) and an MEP said, ‘ideally we [NPD] do vote together. It’s more about the committee, as I think it’s more important to have the discussion’ there (Interview-29).

Three scenarios lead to issues becoming perceived as *controversial*. Firstly, an issue might be particularly salient and have received significant media coverage (e.g. the financial regulation package). In these cases, the European press and national media may be more likely to pay attention to outcomes, but perhaps also the behaviour of groups or NPDs. As the assistant described in the opening vignette, his MEP is more informed anyway about salient issues, and an MEP said; ‘...the groups have a lot of great powers on the technical stuff, but on the big political stuff people tend to take a view of their own. The groups all start to fracture’ (Interview-28).

⁷³ Whitaker (2005) finds the EP’s empowerment has led national parties to become more concerned with their MEPs’ activities, shown by the extent NPDs ensure representativeness among their contingents in legislative committees.

Secondly, some reports particularly highlight ideological differences within the broad transnational groups which are ‘by necessity more diverse and at times less ideologically coherent than their equivalents in national parliaments’ (Watson:2010:97). An MEP described keeping the group together as sometimes like keeping frogs in a wheelbarrow (Interview-18) and another said; ‘the definition of being a liberal: I have had to expand it a lot of times during my first year’ (Interview-42). Thirdly, a report can become *controversial* because of particular policy implications it has for a member state and/or region, and an MEP or NPD may defect to perform their representative role. Rasmussen (2008) argues national affiliation plays a more significant role than has sometimes been assigned particularly on agriculture, employment, and environmental issues. Where there are significant controversial implications, EP politics can become ‘quite member state driven’ (Interview-45):

‘there has been some cases we have voted differently ... But of course there will be some critical issue from our national point of view’ (Interview-39)

‘...there are lots of national interests involved when you are talking about committees such as agriculture, or fisheries ... so these things always come into play and this where you get huge splits’ (Interview-34).

Although MEPs may be alerted to controversy by the (local, national, or international) media, constituents, interest groups, national party, or Permanent Representation, the important thing to grasp is that the NPD *routinely* plays a key role in updating them with reference to the national perspective, and issues brought to MEPs’ attention by other sources are likely to be brought to this forum.

7.4.2 Defection, Size, and Being Taken Seriously

Interviewees agreed that defection due to *controversial issues* is not usually a problem, as long as the group (secretariat) is informed in advance: ‘eventually this happens in almost every delegation, so there is absolutely no point in holding grudges as it disturbs working together in the future’ (Interview-34). Ringe also found that groups are actually quite accepting of dissenting views as long as they ‘do not come as a surprise’ (2010:60,64). We should perhaps note that it is difficult for groups to know, or prove, how MEPs voted unless there is an RCV:

‘The delegation leader has to declare it in the group meeting and say they will not be voting with the EPP line ... Brief explanation and sighing all round, that's it’ (Interview-48)

‘...if there is something that you feel so strongly against that you cannot vote, then you should not do it, you should simply inform your colleagues’ (Interview-37)

‘If they disagree the shadow makes his indications on the voting list because his recommendations stay ... Some reports are roll-called ... then we can then see who voted differently. But what our leader really insists on is that MEPs won't vote differently unless they tell him in advance’ (Interview-53)

‘... anyone who wants to diverge, we won't punish them for that! But they do have to flag it. The reason being, if you oblige a member or national delegation to flag their diversion, its first common courtesy to the people who have worked on the dossier, and because it will theoretically allow the people with the other view to convince. So it allows for a new exchange of information ... the courtesy aspect is very important’⁷⁴ (Interview-57).

The voting intentions of large NPDs are important in the group. NPD size is another form of capital which can affect how influential an MEP's voice is in the group:

‘...a big delegation which is able to organise itself well has influence ... members can say “our delegation thinks”, or even just if a member of that delegation starts talking, then the question not only is how sure do we find the arguments, which is the first question, but then does the speaker represent himself, or 12 MEPs ... Therefore the second aspect ... holds some weight’ (Interview-57).

Large NPDs have an advantage. They can cover more or all of the committees and have more hands on deck to check reports and amendments and to follow debates to spot, raise, and discuss controversial issues and ensure that their preferences are accounted for. Their MEPs are therefore (potentially) able to be better informed more broadly. This stage in the decision-making process is potentially strategically useful as they are better able to come to a position through knowledge exchange on more issues. This advantage creates ‘a difference of functions’ among MEPs (Interview-18) as ‘you can influence things here if you are part of a fairly decent sized delegation. You can find your niche and you can find support within your delegation and that makes a difference ... that was never an avenue which was open to me’ (Interview-27).

Some MEPs from larger NPDs said they did not know how smaller NPDs cope: ‘you must adjust your level of ambition. You just can't assume to be involved in every important topic’ (Interview-32). Some MEPs from smaller NPDs noted their disadvantage. However, some said they arrange themselves to meet regularly with member-state colleagues,

⁷⁴ See Bowler and Farrell (1999) for more on courtesy and parliamentary norms.

sometimes also with their ambassador (Interview-39), or that they contact member-state colleagues in other groups whose opinion they trust (Interview-27). This tended to be MEPs from small member-states. Small NPDs may not be from small member-states: ‘if you are in different parties at home, you follow the general way of the group, but you don’t have to agree on all details with the national delegation as your parties at home might have different agendas’ (Interview-7). One MEP said that in some ways being a small NPD is easier because they have more informal discussions (Interview-39) and MEPs in larger NPDs have to be ‘careful not to tread on colleagues’ political toes’ (Interview-32). Another MEP noted that the bureau acts as a mechanism to balance the ‘handicap’ because it ‘gives you the possibility to have an over proportional say in the group’ (Interview-43).

However, as suggested above, although size matters, it is not the only valid form of capital. Whilst size presents an NPD with the potential to exert influence, they must organise themselves to act cohesively in group plenary to harness this capital to be taken seriously by colleagues:

‘The bigger the NPD is, the bigger power it has in the group, it’s taken more seriously. That is why we are so co-ordinated and work so closely together’ (Interview-7)

‘...the German delegation on issues that matter, boy they’re lined up, they have their votes, they have their substitutes ... If I was a big delegation I would do the same thing, that’s how you influence ... not all other delegations do the same thing’ (Interview-27)

‘[NPD] is very undivided, they are very cohesive. You can’t over rule a united delegation like that. They are very much aware of this. As long as they stick together no one can make things behind their back’ (Interview-42)

‘... [NPD] never makes a political decision, it has never discussed what its political priorities are, how can you take a group seriously if you have no political positioning? ... without this you cannot achieve anything in politics’ (Interview-28).

Cohesion can also be understood as a form of capital to be accumulated by the groups as well as NPDs. To be perceived as a serious player by other actors, a group leader must be able to deliver votes in plenary. Because no group has ever held an overall majority, alliances are required to pass legislation and coalitions shift constantly (VoteWatch:2010). This means constructive working relations between the groups are critical for those aiming to influence legislative outcomes. As discussed in Chapter 4, working and forming alliances with other groups is an important part of the everyday practice of politics in the EP. Leaders and officials may invite other groups (e.g. rapporteurs) to their office to discuss reports (Interview-47). This is why it is vital that MEPs and NPDs tell the group in

advance if they wish to defect, ‘so that they can actually judge if they will win or lose ... it’s really a game’ (Interview-53). As a senior assistant explained:

‘...it’s embarrassing for a group to commit itself ... and then do something different in plenary...it loses its power and its image, because sometimes the 3 biggest groups make a coalition or agreement on how to vote ... and if you have a group who says 80% will vote yes and then 50% object, then maybe the legislation will not go through because your group wasn’t united ... it’s embarrassing [...] It’s not so much a matter of trust, as a matter of other groups taking you seriously as a group and making deals with you. If you are supposed to be committed to do something and then you don’t ... it’s not an important group’ (Interview-7).

A cohesive party benefits from higher predictability and a reputation for reliability (Hix et al:2007:87-91). Whilst it is respected that MEPs must represent their constituents, it is also important for the group to maintain a *serious* reputation. A leader cannot make deals if they cannot be relied upon to deliver their group:

‘If you want to punch above your weight you’ve got to be able to be seen to be able to deliver the votes, and be seen to be able to influence things’ (Interview-28)

‘...we are very much aware we have great influence in determining the outcome on many issues because when the right or left are split, the vote is decided by us, but only if we’re together ... if there is a tight vote and you need everybody following the group line and you don’t have it on the day you have committed yourself, it can be embarrassing’ (Interview-49).

The importance of informing the group in advance is part of a wider process of being taken *seriously* and therefore being included in the political game. An official joked the ECR was put *out* in the WIB building to ostracise them from the *serious* groups (Appendix-7). An MEP said when the ECR was formed, ‘it was as if we were being punished ... If it was ECR then it was a no, even on sensible things ... But as we’ve progressed people are supporting us, looking at what we’re saying’ (Interview-45). It seems to take time to build a *serious* reputation in the EP.

To understand a social situation we must ask what game actors are playing (Calhoun:2000:274-8). Not all the groups are playing the same game and aiming to be perceived as serious players to influence legislative outcomes. For example, some eurosceptic EFD and NI MEPs aim to promote an anti-integration agenda rather than focusing on influencing the minutiae of EU legislation. I suggest that they have different stakes and therefore employ different strategies (e.g. One Minute speeches) to the mainstream centre groups, and that perhaps this could help us understand why they display lower cohesion rates (see VoteWatch:2010). However for the mainstream centre groups,

the dynamic achievement of cohesion described can also be understood as strategy in the political game. Whilst size matters, a reputation as a cohesive group is also an important form of capital, for actors aiming to be perceived as serious players.

7.5 A Community of Practice

An ethnographic approach has provided a deeper understanding of the role of the group – and subsequently the achievement of cohesion – by taking a broader approach and exploring the role of the group in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics more fully. The group and NPD can fruitfully be conceptualised as CoPs to help us further understand MEPs’ decision-making behaviour. This section further explores the group as a CoP and its development of a shared history through its knowledge sharing practice.

7.5.1 Shared Practice

Group membership gives MEPs access to important resources. In 2010 the EP allocated €53.75mil proportionally to the groups which was used for group activities and they possess staff, office space, and technical facilities (Corbett et al:2011:111). Perhaps more importantly plenary speaking time, committee places, and EP offices and reports are allocated proportionally– vital tools with which to play the game. The groups are central to the EP’s internal organisation and functioning and set the agenda and compete for goods, as well as co-ordinating voting behaviour (McElroy:2006:178, Hix et al:2003b). An assistant said, ‘it’s hard to know what the groups do, because they are so a part of everything’ (Interview-3). When asked directly, some MEPs spoke of group membership instrumentally⁷⁵:

‘they are a fantastic piece of machinery as far as secretarial support is concerned, they help you in that way’ (Interview-45)

‘you’re part of this bigger group, there is this infrastructure there to help you do the work’ (Interview-1).

However further exploration through participant observation revealed more detail of the nature of the extensive support role these structures play as CoPs which, through their

⁷⁵ BBC Democracy Live found UKIP MEPs have ‘scraped together’ enough MEPs to form a group but ‘are very clear they’re in it for the extra funding and the influence’ these structures provide (18/8/2010).

shared practice, help MEPs to cope and make informed decisions, as well as enabling them to pursue their particular aims and interests more successfully:

‘the least we require from our members is transparency about how they intend to vote ... other than that, the MEPs are expecting their particular dossiers that they follow through committee, or worked on themselves, but there is so much legislation that they can’t follow, they rely on the group steering them’ (Interview-49)

‘...that’s the advantage of being part of a group, you have more value, you can be a specialist and keep a broader understanding of everything else, and rely on your colleagues’ (Interview-3).

These structures enable MEPs to focus on particular issues and then rely on their *core group* – where controversy is not raised - of expert colleagues and colleagues possessing political expertise with who they share PPC, to routinely guide them in non-expert areas⁷⁶. By becoming specialists themselves and working with colleagues in *prep* and policy advisors, an MEP can in turn influence the group line by becoming part of the *core group* for their policy area, to successfully pursue these issues, if they can convince their colleagues to follow them. This dynamic facilitates cohesion which is required to be perceived as a serious player and therefore this practice also helps the CoP to pursue its domain.

The groups are ‘more than mere coalitions of individual members who vote together when it suits them’ (Ringe:2009:23). However whilst Ringe stops at claiming they serve as a decision-making short-cut, I found that the EP groups are also social groups and can be understood as CoPs. CoPs are collegial groups who share a concern, set of problems, or passion, and share information on a regular basis to further a common domain⁷⁷, as the MEP and his group colleagues do. NPDs and groups don’t work together every day, but meet regularly because they find value in their interactions where they share knowledge. The knowledge accumulated in a group’s pursuit of its ideologically based interests can be seen as its domain because it creates common ground, a sense of identity, and membership implies a commitment to it. MEPs form a community and care about and pursue a domain, which fosters regular interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. These CoPs are as much about surviving the work environment as specific goals (Wenger:1998:6).

⁷⁶ A danger however is that a minority can hijack an issue and argue their case in the group with jargon which intimidates others so the silent majority ends up going along with a position they don’t agree with (Interview-41, also see Krehbiel:1991).

⁷⁷ Wenger et al (2002) describe how CoPs share information, but I refer to a ‘knowledge’ sharing dynamic to account for Wodak’s (2009:46) three types of knowledge which are required to function in the EP.

Over time, MEPs develop an identity in relation to this community through their committee work or office held. The knowledge shared through the dynamic described constitutes an important part of the shared practice the group develops – and it helps the community proceed more efficiently. Participating in a group helps an MEP to spend less time seeking information and solutions and to keep abreast of relevant developments. CoPs connect learning and performance in organisations, but a community will not thrive if it is unclear how participation benefits members and they therefore do not invest themselves and their time. Some MEPs do not attend group or NPD meetings, regularly or at all, or contribute their expertise. MEPs may not if they do not get something in return which means they see the CoP as a good use of their (*precious*) time – for example routinely acquiring reliable knowledge, seeing their own interests pursued successfully, or seeing their community being successful:

‘It isn’t the be-all-and-end-all to be number one slot in VoteWatch but ... everybody wants to be first ... you can be the biggest but not necessarily the most influential’ (Interview-49)

‘We all like to have influence ... You can see how ALDE people vote by the outcome of the vote. That happens a lot ... I would be upset if not. I wouldn’t like losing all the time’ (Interview-41).

7.5.2 A Community

Working with other groups is a vital part of the practice of politics here, in personal offices, committees, group offices, among rapporteurs and shadows, and in the Conference of Presidents (Chapter 8). Interviewees discussed the importance of good relations with other groups’ MEPs to pass legislation through committees and plenary, but also among MEPs as a social group:

‘We do more working with other groups, you just wouldn’t do that back home’ (Interview-28)

‘you have to keep the others on board, for it to get through plenary ... that’s what is exciting about politics here, the payoff between going for what you believe in and having to be pragmatic’ (Interview-3)

‘The thing I like most is that people are not so strict on their political groups. I have a lot of projects that are EPP or S&D, or Greens, without having any problems. No one will say that I am from ALDE group and so we won’t discuss with ALDE group ... people want to cooperate ... you can form a majority with EPP and for another amendment with S&D’ (Interview-40)

‘At Christmas I invite all the [region] MEP’s to my Strasbourg apartment for a drink, regardless of party ... It’s nice. At the end of the day, we might differ in opinions but we can support each other’ (Interview-45).

However, as described, whilst cross-group working is important, the NPD and group are the MEP and office’s *first port of call* and the community from which he regularly receives updates and with whom he shares knowledge. Wenger et al (2002:20) say that CoPs provide points of connection in mobile and chaotic worlds and stability for professionals in organisations characterised by movement and change, as which this constantly evolving transnational institution can be categorised. Interviewees described how they experience their groups in these ways:

‘the fact you belong to a political group, makes you a member of a political family’ (Interview-7)

‘in politics you need a political home ... otherwise you go into the “no friends brigade” with the extremists’ (Interview-48)

‘[Secretary-General] ... structures the rhythm, the heartbeat of the group’ (Interview-32).

An EP official stressed it is important to remember that *politics isn’t just a game, its human, emotional and natural*. He compared the groups with university societies which bring like-minded people together in a new place. The value of being a member of a CoP is not merely instrumental; ‘it also accrues in the personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each others’ perspectives’ (Wenger et al:2002). Over time, members develop a shared history, sense of a shared perspective and common identity (Wodak:2009) as well as developing shared knowledge and relationships through their regular interaction. The MEP’s group secretariat is beginning to put together its own archives to record its history (Interview-14). Members of a CoP become informally bonded by the value of learning together (Wenger et al:2002:4-5), as I observed.

MEPs routinely spend time in their committees and groups. An MEP said, ‘I’ve been on the environment committee for nearly 12 years and it is home’ (Interview-41, see Neuhold:2007). However whilst MEPs pursue issues in their committees, they rely on their group and NPD colleagues to help them cope and do their job. Whilst these broad transnational groups may not be experienced in the same way as (richer historied) national parties because ‘it’s not so tribal out there’ (Interview-45) and defection to another group is ‘definitely not unthinkable’ (Interview-10, see Corbett et al:2011:111, Evans&Vink:2012),

there are important 'relations of trust created within the group' (Interview-57). This insight can help us to understand individual MEPs' decision-making behaviour. As well as the important role of socialising newcomers into the habitus (Interview-52,32), trust and informal bonding within the group are reinforced by the routine exchange of knowledge which occurs each month, and the social interactions occurring within this community.

The arrangement of the MEP offices means MEPs routinely interact informally with their NPD and group colleagues in the corridors. MEPs often walk to the lift in groups and chat on the considerable journeys up and down and around the building (Belkacem:2013). They see group colleagues routinely in group plenary. These meetings usually begin with house-keeping announcements which promote a feeling of the group as a political family. These include birthdays, the celebration of election results and events back home, and announcements encouraging MEPs and staff to attend events organised by the group and its MEPs. The MEP is more likely to attend an event organised by the group and the MEPs support each others' activities in this way. During group meetings, MEPs wander in and often chat in the aisles before sitting down and walk out in groups, catching up on news and events. During fieldwork, two group *weeks* were held in different NPD's member-states, which included a programme of social activities and resulted in stories told for months afterwards. Some MEPs and staff also go to the annual europarty conference together.

Meanwhile, the monthly trip to Strasbourg also builds and reinforces bonds between members of the (social) group. Interviewees universally agreed that bringing an end to the dual seat arrangement would improve efficiency as well as saving money, and this was also the most common problem raised by the survey respondents (31%)⁷⁸ (Question-18). Van Hulten (2011:44) reports that travelling to and working in Strasbourg has adverse effects on MEPs' and officials' working and personal lives and mental health. They work long hours after lengthy travelling, and stay in over-priced hotels. They often go to events or dine together in the city. As an assistant said; 'you stick together more in Strasbourg because you only know each other' (Interview-3) and cannot go home. Among the assistants, your first trip to Strasbourg is seen as a rite of passage, but the monthly trip is the source of much communal complaining. Bonding within the MEP's group is further encouraged by two annual events in Strasbourg, the summer barbecue and Christmas party, which again lead

⁷⁸ Also see <http://www.singleseat.eu/index.html>.

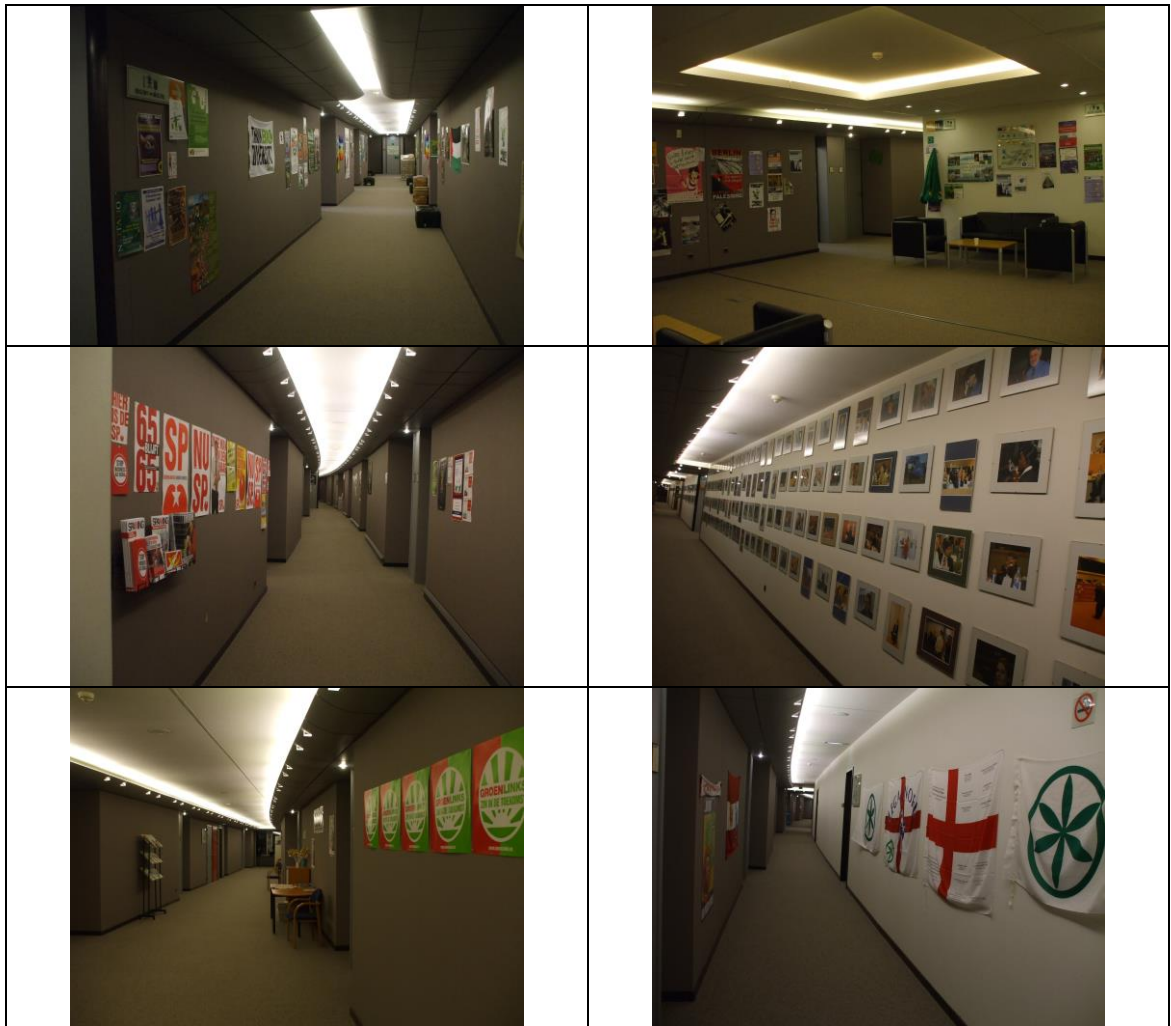
to much gossiping before and afterwards: ‘well the jokes if I may start, obviously this is the good parties and the good people ... some of the groups are quite jealous, tomorrow again we have the Christmas party’ (Interview-37). An assistant told me she meets people there she e-mails regularly but has not met during the year. As Manning says, organisations become visible during celebrations (2008:684). These routines and rituals reinforce relations of trust within the group, which we should remember is also a social group. Through its routine sharing of knowledge and common domain, the group develops a sense of a common history and identity as well as its practice.

7.5.3 The Group Habitus

Quality ethnography requires researchers to reflect upon their positionality (Chapter 2). After several months, I began to assume the groups operated and made decisions in exactly the same way as each other. Two moments catalysed reflection on this. Firstly, as we were boarding the coach to the summer barbecue, the MEP also said he always enjoys this party and thinks that the other groups may be jealous. His group is the perfect size for such an event, big enough to make it worthwhile but small enough it feels people know each other and to include entertainment by each NPD and the handing out of Christmas presents to each MEP. This suggests that rituals and habits may vary in the different groups, which indicates the potential for some fascinating further comparative work. Secondly, interviewees suggested that the habitus of each group varies in subtle but potentially important ways. An official who had worked for three groups suggested practices vary in accordance with political philosophies⁷⁹ (Photos-13 below). He found the S&D is more centralised with the leadership playing a more important role, that the EPP prioritises the NPDs and therefore their leaders are favoured in speaking routines, and that ALDE prioritises individuals and the MEPs sit in alphabetical order with a name placard unlike in other groups (Interview-15).

Photos 13: Groups’ floors

⁷⁹ See also Abélès’ analysis of Giscard’s attempt to move the Liberals into the EPP (1993:13).



This suggests the groups are each developing their own habitus, which they subsequently socialise newcomers into. Wenger et al describe practice as including concrete objects and less tangible displays of competence: ‘it also embodies a certain way of behaving ... in this sense, a practice is a sort of mini-culture that binds the community together’ and therefore affects the behaviours and abilities of members (2002:39-44). Members expect each other to master this for the CoP to work effectively, as Bourdieu’s actors acquire the habitus. Interviewees suggested the groups have similar formal procedures:

‘I wouldn’t think the other groups would work too differently because at the end of the day we are in the same rhythm of committee and group and plenary’ (Interview-32)

‘All the groups have broadly speaking the same set of procedures. It’s a very federalist institution and quite bureaucratic’ (Interview-48)

‘It’s very similar. The only difference is that the socialist group is much bigger ... In the socialist’s bureau there are 6 vice presidents. In the ALDE bureau, they have the national leader of every party ... That would be the biggest difference. The working groups, the committees, the prep meetings, the group meetings are really the same’ (Interview-34).

However they described variation in informal practices, habits and tendencies - the habitus or practice of each group:

‘... the EPP is very business-like, rather stodgy, very predictable, well organised with a good staff, ALDE is much more vociferous and fizzy, very democratic ... the EPP is quite a disciplined group ... it’s just the instinctive centre right position, pretty orthodox, largely catholic, mostly Christian, so quite well organised. ALDE is much more disorganised and much more fun’ (Interview-48)

‘... the Greens are usually very active, they are that kind of group’ (Interview-12)

‘There are different cultures ... the secretary general of the Green group would have a much more political role, speaking in group meetings, so the difference between administration and member there is small’ (Interview-26)

‘A lot depends on who's in charge ... who's the president, who's the secretary general. In ALDE they’ve had the same secretary general for years, so then you have certain things that are immovable, unchangeable. Then you have Verhofstadt, which is moving the group towards the left. And although he's a very strong leader, he’s still seeking consensus’ (Interview-34)

‘Every group is very much themselves. The Green group is perhaps the most anarchistic, both in terms of the relationships between the individuals, the group staff or members ... the largest groups are the best disciplined because they’ve developed cultures, because not everyone can have their say at every meeting ... you’ve got to have a system whereby the main decisions are taken by the national delegation leaders’ (Interview-18).

MEPs must therefore also acquire the habitus, or master the practice, of their group and gain a feel for the game and accumulate valid capital to be able to exert influence most effectively in the dynamic backstage process described. It may be a more effective strategy to gain a position in the presidency of the S&D, as an NPD leader in the EPP, or build a reputation as a specialist in ALDE, to be able to routinely have the best potential opportunity to influence the debate and subsequently the voting list on which your colleagues rely.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of the group in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics and ‘normal’ decision-making process (Ringe:2010:209). It has explored the knowledge exchange dynamic occurring in this backstage CoP. I have argued that the group can fruitfully be conceptualised as CoP to provide a deeper understanding of the role this structure plays in MEPs’ everyday practice of politics. Again, by exploring MEP behaviour

as social practice, we understand MEPs as active agents rather than bearers of structures. By exploring the dynamic voting list construction process and individual MEPs' role in this, this chapter has also presented a deeper understanding of group cohesion.

The following findings have been presented. Firstly, building on Ringe's (2010) work, resource-short MEPs focus on committee work and then rely on guidance from trusted expert colleagues with whom they share PPC, to make voting decisions in their non-expert areas. Group meetings are where knowledge is routinely exchanged between experts and non-experts and 'invested' MEPs can ensure their preferences are accounted for. The groups play a supportive role in individual MEPs' endeavour and the knowledge exchange dynamic helps them to cope with their work environment, focus on strategically pursuing their aims, and the CoP to pursue its domain. Section 1 has shown that the strict structuring of time in the EP facilitates and reinforces this dynamic. The backstage meeting routine acts as an 'early warning system' for the group secretariat to identify reports where it will be difficult to reach a group line. Frontstage cohesion is the result of weeks of backstage efforts, particularly by the *core group*. Non-expert MEPs tend to follow the *core group* who have accumulated valid capital; (1) relevant legislative offices, (2) a specialist reputation, or (3) the group leader position. However influence is not automatic and MEPs must give credible performances to convince their colleagues. MEPs can then follow the voting list because they trust it is based on expertise from colleagues with whom they share PPC and that the construction routine will have highlighted controversial issues.

Secondly, the NPDs play an important role in this dynamic as the site where the national perspective is routinely discussed. *Controversial issues* are raised and MEPs negotiate their multiple roles. These meetings are particularly important for NPDs whose party is in government at home. *Controversy* may lead MEPs or NPDs to defect, which is not usually a problem if the group (secretariat) is informed in advance. This is crucial because groups must make alliances to pass legislation through plenary. To be perceived as a serious player in the game by other players, a leader must be able to deliver votes in plenary. Whilst size matters, cohesion can also be understood as an important form of capital, due to the EP's lack of a permanent majority and the EU's institutional design (Chapter 8).

Thirdly, the groups, as CoPs, not only develop shared practice but also develop a shared history and identity. Whilst not experienced in the same way as national parties, the groups

are also social groups. Their shared endeavour, activities, and rituals encourage informal bonding which further builds relations of trust, which, as this chapter has shown, can help us gain a deeper understanding of MEPs' decision-making behaviour. The next chapter builds on these findings, elaborating the distinction between legislative and political expertise raised, and further explores the games being played in this transnational political field.

Chapter 8:

A Transnational Political Field: playing the game and exerting influence

‘Political sociology ... concentrates on the study of power and the junction of personality, social structure and politics’
(Adler-Nissen:2009:79).

8.1 Legislative and Political Experts

Ethnographic immersion enabled me to take a more holistic approach to MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics. Observing an MEP’s backstage activities and routines has revealed some of the ways in which MEPs play the political game here (Wodak:2009:74). After months of participant observation and interviews, I began to take for granted the idea that MEPs, consciously and unconsciously, specialise in a narrow range of subjects, mostly and usually related to their committee(s), to exert influence in processes and over outcomes by using their expert knowledge to convince non-experts to follow their recommendations. In December, I put this proposition to an MEP who replied:

‘I would challenge the premise; you do not necessarily have to focus on a particular topic, if you are in the leadership of a group, this is when you steer processes rather than influence a particular topic... I would agree with the premise, only if people like Martin Schulz don't focus on a particular topic ... they don't have the time, but, if you’re a regular member in a committee, and you build a reputation on a particular subject matter, one that is preferably not a one off ... then you should build this reputation and you should, if you’re actually serious, if the quality of your work is ok, and is seen as such by colleagues, and if you get along with people... then you can be very effective and influence legislation for 500-million people. That’s the kick of being an MEP’ (Interview-32).

He continued to differentiate between political and legislative experts, expertise, and levels when asked about which MEPs are influential in the group’s decision-making process:

‘It’s clearly the group leader. It’s a number of colleagues, who, mostly on merit, really wield influence because they are very smart, because they are good at what they do and they are hard-working, and they are committed to the success of the things that they do ... that sample already tells you in way of political substance, the coordinators have a key role. Because the substantive work is done at committee level ... On a more political level, I would say it’s the group leader whose job it is to hammer out common lines and coordinate positions from what is rather a heterogeneous bunch of people ... these are the two groups’ (Interview-32).

Here the MEP, as did others, differentiates between legislative and political expertise as forms of capital. This chapter elaborates on this distinction and further explores the games being played in this transnational political field.

8.2 Introduction

This thesis has explored the everyday practice of politics by describing activities and routines occurring in three backstage CoPs found to be key to MEPs' daily endeavour. 'Tacking' between the whole and the part in this way can help us grasp complex phenomena, such as MEP behaviour, more fully (Cerwonka&Malkki:2007:15). Chapter 4 provided a broader introduction to the habitus as the context in which the CoPs are embedded and MEPs practice politics. This chapter analyses the EP as a transnational political field; a system of power related positions in which MEPs are positioned. I argue that MEPs accumulate valid capital to successfully convince and persuade other actors, or players, to follow their recommendations. This chapter investigates the types of capital available for accumulation and the strategies MEPs employ to play successfully within the habitus and doxa.

The argument progresses as follows. Influence is diffused widely in the EP but Bourdieu's thinking tools can help us understand this messy social situation. Structural Constructivism's approach to structure and agency enables us to explore how actors exert influence because it focuses on 'the junction of personality, social structure and politics' (Adler-Nissen:2009:79). The habitus is described as egalitarian and inclusive but some MEPs are perceived to be more influential than others. These MEPs have accumulated valid individual and delegated capital. This includes possession of formal offices, particularly co-ordinator or group leader, or an informal reputation as a hardworking, co-operative, specialist. These MEPs constitute the *core group* which is reproduced through socialisation practices. Analysis of the types of capital available indicates that rather than a level playing field, the EP is experienced and can be better understood as a field with two levels, a political and legislative sub-field. In both, a consensual approach is vital for success due to the EP's position in the EU 'super-field' (Kauppi:2011:154). MEPs perform multiple roles on a daily basis, but interviews suggest their membership of this institution is sometimes prioritised over other roles.

Regarding the research question, this chapter explores some of the ways MEPs successfully pursue their aims in this transnational political field. Regarding the research issues, it primarily focuses on the opportunities and constraints individual MEPs face. Regarding the theoretical framework, it analyses the EP as a transnational political field and its capital and

doxa. The chapter particularly utilises the interview data, to explore local perceptions of where influence lies and how it is exerted. Section 1 discusses the diffusion of influence in the EP and use of Structural Constructivism in this chapter. Section 2 explores the habitus and forms of capital available. Section 3 investigates the EP's political and legislative sub-fields and effects produced by its position in the EU 'super-field' (Kauppi:2011:154).

8.3 A De-Centred Institution

8.3.1 The Diffusion of Influence

No government arises from this legislature and influence is dispersed widely, running like capillaries permeating the backstages of an institution which has no obvious centre. This is illustrated in the variety of answers given by the assistants when asked who has the most influence over legislation (Question-13). Scully says, 'compared to the executive-dominated parliaments of many countries in Europe, power in the EP is much more widely diffused' and that it is 'a highly complex and relatively de-centred institution'⁸⁰ (2007:182). This section briefly outlines aspects pertaining to this diffusion.

Firstly, the EP President 'directs Parliament's activities, chairs plenary sittings and declares the budget finally adopted' and 'represents Parliament in the outside world and in its relations with the other EU institutions' (European Parliament: About Parliament). According to the Rules of Procedure (2010), the President's duties are to 'preside over the proceedings of Parliament and to ensure that they are properly conducted' (Rule 20). The duties are procedural and in the chamber the President 'may speak in a debate only to sum up or to call speakers to order' (Rule 20). Therefore rather than provide political leadership, the President plays a 'speaker' role (Scully:2007:181). Interviewees agreed that the President's role is largely ceremonial but that s/he has an important role in representing the EP and its values, particularly democracy and human rights, around the world (Interviews-6,13,24) .

Secondly, leadership and control do not come from the executive branch. The EU is closer to a (semi or quasi) presidential than parliamentary system. Once elected, the Commission does not need the continued support of the EP majority and therefore there is no

⁸⁰ For a relevant discussion about the distinction between 'power' and 'influence' see Rasmussen (2013), Chapter 2.

governing party to threaten MEPs with government collapse (Hix et al:2007:87-91, Scully:2007:182). An official explained that in the national context you are beholden to the three line whip because otherwise 'you are out on a limb, because governments fall or survive on the basis of parliamentary votes. We don't have that' (Interview-49). Another said;

'our members are still members in the very original sense of the word, which are not so very closely linked to government actions which form opinions and conclusions on every dossier ... their possibilities to influence events are much greater than for the average member of national parliaments' (Interview-26).

Thirdly, leadership does not come from one political group. During the EP's seven elected legislatures, no group has ever held a majority (European Parliament: In the Past) and coalitions shift constantly. In 2010, when fieldwork was conducted, the EPP and S&D voted together 69% of the time and ALDE with the EPP 76% and the S&D 79% of the time (Appendix-4). VoteWatch have shown that the largest group does not always win the most often and that ALDE is the 'kingmaker' and was on the winning side most often in 2010, 89% of the time (2010:3-4). Although coalitions shift constantly, VoteWatch (2010) has identified regular winning coalitions in different policy areas.

These findings highlight a fourth institutional aspect; the EP's strong committee system. The EP is 'a prime example of a committee-based parliament' (Whitaker:2001:64). McElroy says 'the EP in committee is the EP at work' because most of MEPs' activity is concentrated in committees rather than the chamber (2006a:6). Asked to choose their first preference between group president, EP president, NPD leader, or committee chair, committee chair was the most popular option among MEPs and McElroy says this shows that MEPs believe the committee system is 'a focal point of power that matters to the legislative process' (2006:9). Parties and committees are the two main organisational units within legislatures but 'the relationship between them remains the subject of scholarly debate' (Whitaker:2001:63).

Whitaker investigated the extent to which group leaders control the committee assignment process and influence committee activities. He finds the mechanisms for leaders to control assignments are weak and compares the roles of committee chairs and group co-ordinators. Whitaker stresses the importance of the personalities involved and NPD size, and suggests that ultimately a number of figures are influential, but that co-ordinators can wield

significant influence over proceedings. Insofar as co-ordinators play a dominant role, there is support for party-centred theories suggesting committees are instruments of parties (2001:80-82). An official stressed that committees are ‘where the knowledge is’ but not where the decision-making power is, which lies with the groups (Interview-6).

Other actors have been suggested to exert influence. Scully notes that the parliamentary hierarchy is headed by the Conference of Presidents (2007:181), further evidence of the importance of the groups. As discussed in Chapter 7, the groups are an integral part of the internal organisation of the EP and MEPs’ voting behaviour. However they lack traditional disciplinary instruments because they do not control electoral lists, and have a limited capacity to provide ‘pork’ (McElroy:2006:10), or rewards within the confines of the D’Hondt procedure. As described, influence is also dispersed within these structures rather than concentrated with the leaders.

Some external factors appear to wield influence less routinely than might be expected. Although the role of national parties was discussed with interviewees, they were never cited when interviewees were asked about influential actors in the EP and groups. As discussed in Chapter 4, in the *bubble*, MEPs perceive themselves to have a lot of freedom to pursue their interests. An MEP told Whitaker, ‘the thing that surprised me was people said to me you can come here and do what you like ... it means that people pursue their own interests’ (2001:74). EP Secretary-General Klaus Welle has said that MEPs are independent in ‘a strong and global sense’ (12/10/2010) and a senior official said, ‘here you have all kinds of influences ... its a very complex set which doesn’t allow for people to exaggerate their own position. It doesn’t allow for command structures’ (Interview-26). However it is important we seek to understand which, where, and how actors influence proceedings and outcomes.

8.3.2 Structural Constructivism

Bourdieu’s thinking tools can help us make sense of this complexity. His work reminds us that actors are embedded and act from their position within power structures. Actors in institutions have differential access to power over others and ‘taking unequal power relations into account brings a shift from the institution in and of itself to the institution as a vector of power’ (Jenson&Mérand:2010:87). Structural Constructivism can help us analyse the dynamic behaviour of agents within structures. It sees structure and agency as

inseparably related and actors as constrained by material and symbolic structures and struggling to accumulate resources. Social meanings are generated around structures which reflect an institution's history but neither the field nor the habitus can unilaterally determine action (Adler-Nissen:2009:82-6). Practice is informed by agency but must be contextualised in relation to social structures of possibility and constraint.

To briefly re-cap, a field is a structured system of social positions which define the situation for occupants, and a system of forces exists between these positions (Jenkins:2002:85). Actors compete for the capital which the stratification of the field is based upon. An actor's position and types and amount of capital enable them to influence the game (Webb et al:2002:23). Capital is derived from resources which count as valid currency and is accumulated in interactions. Within the game, or struggle for influence, actors can use their position and capital strategically. Strategies are the day-to-day tactics employed in the field. Actors acquire strategies from their experience of the field, their practical sense of logic (Bourdieu:1990). Actors consciously and unconsciously develop a feel for the game being played. Fields generate a habitus, a socially acquired system of dispositions which provides the rules of the game and standards, and certain dispositions are more likely to lead to success. Actors' understanding of goals is also informed by the doxa, and the supply of options develops in response to the constraints of the field's history. These foundational rules are the taken-for-granted premise which makes co-operation meaningful. This framework enables us to explore the opportunities and constraints individual MEPs face from their position in the field (see Chapter 3 for more on the framework).

8.4 Playing the Game and Exerting Influence

8.4.1 A Consensual Habitus

Bourdieu's work suggests that to understand any social situation we must ask what game or games actors are playing and how they play (Calhoun:2000:277). As discussed in Chapter 4, the habitus this field has generated is consensual and co-operative. In the EP, compromise is 'not a dirty word' (Wheeler:22/1/2009). This is perhaps unsurprising given the de-centred and transnational nature of the institution:

'...in this place with an inbuilt non-majority, and also because you've taken some of the sting out of the confrontation because its multinational and multicultural, people on the

whole know they have to behave with a greater delicacy, less brutality, than if it was nationally' (Interview-35).

The habitus is described by participants as consensual, co-operative, egalitarian, and inclusive. MEPs seeking to shape EU legislation and EP politics work day in and day out to find consensus (Interview-29) and the lack of a permanent majority means working and forming alliances with other groups is a vital part of the everyday practice of politics here:

'You don't want to put yourself in a position where you will be the recipient of your "medicine" ... if you push things, coerce, and piss-off everybody else on the point of principle, tomorrow they might use it against you. And as we are, broadly speaking, working on an approach that is trying to build some rudimentary consensus, and that you don't have fixed majorities at the end of the day that is the bottom line of the whole system ... It is based ... on respect for each other and each others' work' (Interview-47).

Most interviewees were overwhelmingly positive about the opportunities this approach presents; 'it's up to us and our ability to convince and how much we are able to negotiate on the amendments, compromises and everything. It depends on each of us to be able to do it' (Interview-40). Even for the smaller groups, 'there are ways in which we can influence legislation, it's not as much as we would hope, but otherwise it would be so much worse' (Interview-2).

The habitus is experienced as (relatively) egalitarian and enabling – by and for MEPs who develop a feel for the game (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3 - 4.4.4). An EP official said, 'we are a very egalitarian society ... Everybody is paid equally ... If you are interested in the content of the matter then it's a great place' (Interview-26). An MEP said 'nobodies' can exert influence (Interview-52) and an assistant said everyone 'gets a shot at being a part, and making legislation' because MEPs 'create' legislation, rather than there being a less productive government-opposition dynamic (Interview-3). However asking interviewees about who they think are the most influential actors revealed that some MEPs are perceived to be 'more equal'⁸¹ than others⁸²:

'in a [committee bureau] at the beginning we had a big turn-out and some very new people, and one of them nicely asked ... "so how does it work here, how do we decide rapporteur or where we go?" and one member who had been there quite some time ... said, "well, basically, we have discussion and we put our views forward, and some of our views count for more than others" (Interview-51).

⁸¹ Weatherford says Congress is 'a body of 535 equals in which some are more equal than others' (1985:25).

⁸² I note again that some MEPs from smaller member-states described this as a structural disadvantage as they are less able to obtain formal offices in the EP (Interviews 37 and 43).

8.4.2 Valid Capital

Some MEPs are perceived by participants to be more influential than others⁸³. They have accumulated valid individual and delegated capital and employ it strategically from their position in the field.

8.4.2.1 Individual and Delegated Capital

Whilst the habitus is linked to practice, the field ‘provides an understanding of the structures of a social system’ (Adler-Nissen:2009:95). It invites us to ask, how are MEPs positioned and what counts as valid resources for status and influence? Beauvallet and Michon (2010) have identified the relative closure of this parliamentary space and their analysis shows ‘positions are structured around the distribution of specific resources, linked to the exercise of a European mandate and to the effective participation of actors in the political games at European level’ (2010:161).

As discussed in Chapter 7, a *core group* of MEPs routinely influences the construction of voting lists. It consists of MEPs possessing particular formal offices, informal reputations as specialists, and the group leader. Bourdieu differentiates between political capital acquired by delegation and by the individual. Delegated capital is acquired through investiture by an institution, where an individual receives a limited and provisional transfer of collective capital when capital becomes institutionalized in positions. Individual capital is accumulated by the individual, either slowly or during a crisis and disappears with the individual (Kauppi:2003:780). This distinction operates in the EP; MEPs (can) employ formal offices and/or an informal reputation to exert influence. Accumulating one or both of these forms of capital is an important strategy for MEPs wanting to exert influence.

8.4.2.2 Formal Offices: ‘pivotal’ co-ordinators and ‘steering’ group leaders

I asked interviewees who they thought were the most influential actors in the EP and groups, and the MEPs how they go about achieving their goals⁸⁴. The responses reinforced

⁸³ In an AFET meeting in June, an ECR MEP suggested the High Representative should have deputies from across the political families so that she could get to know the EP’s ‘movers and shakers’.

⁸⁴ When asked what it takes to be a *good* MEP, they usually said listening to constituents’ views and representing them in Brussels. However, when asked what it takes to be an *effective* MEP, removing a normative element, MEPs revealed strategies through which they pursue their aims and interests.

the insight that a small group of MEPs is perceived to be more influential. This *core group* includes MEPs who possess formal offices (delegated capital) with *pivotal* or *steering* roles.

The MEP once joked that *you can tell how important an MEP is by how many units they have*. Most MEPs' offices consist of two units but MEPs possessing certain offices (e.g. Committee Chair) have more units, displaying their elevated position in the field. Formal offices give actors more opportunity to exert influence. When asked about how to be an effective MEP, MEPs suggested that the best *route* is to become a full committee member, shadow, then rapporteur where you learn what meetings take place and how the system works, and then committee chair or group vice president (e.g. Interviews-18,28,32). Formal offices give actors access to restricted meetings, documents, and additional staff, meaning they have more opportunity and potential to arrive prepared for and to influence the decision-making process and thinking about an issue, by speaking first, last, and more often, and perhaps also by chairing meetings, shaping agendas, and allocating speakers and tasks. Possessing a formal office means other actors are more likely to approach you with knowledge.

Co-ordinators, rapporteurs, and shadows speak routinely and can provide expertise others do not possess, and group and committee chairs usually open and close debates, set the agenda, provide summaries, and guide debates. These MEPs often give prepared performances, reporting on developments to less- and non- expert colleagues. Possession of an office means an actor can potentially routinely influence the decision-making process, firstly if they choose to – and MEPs do not engage equally with rapporteurships (Interview-12) - and secondly if they give credible performances; 'when we are negotiating compromises it might depend on how vocal they are and how such they are, because if it's a shadow rapporteur from a big group, but they are not very good at expressing their position, then I expect ... after their group meeting, changes' (Interview-12).

Eleven formal offices are available for acquisition (see pp.30). This field is not strictly hierarchical because, as discussed, influence is dispersed rather than flowing unidirectionally. Forces exist between positions but different actors are more influential in different parts of the political game being played. Two offices commonly cited as influential were 'co-ordinator' and 'group leader'. As an MEP explained, 'in way of political substance, the co-ordinators have a key role. Because the substantive work is done at committee level, and the people who represent the group in the small meetings of the co-

ordinators there, they have a large degree of influence. On the more political level, I would clearly say it's the group leader, whose job it is to hammer out common lines' (Interview-32). These offices were also mostly commonly cited as the most important actors in the groups by the assistants (Question-17).

Co-ordinators play an important role in the EP. They chair *prep* meetings and (try to) co-ordinate the group in committee in terms of voting and sharing the work. The ease of their task depends on the personalities involved. They are expected to have a horizontal view and keep up with all the reports and issues for their group, may replace absent shadows, and organise speakers and trips. Co-ordinators play a *pivotal* role moving, or hinging, between the group and committee; 'the coordinator is an intermediary between the group and the committee itself. So it should meet the political views of the group with the specific, technical point of views of the committee' (Interview-40). With the committee chair they 'manage all the life of the committee collectively' (Interview-44). They then lead on the group line and promote the committee in their group (Interview-40,51). Having a skilled co-ordinator who knows how to 'do politics' – by which the MEP meant being good at building alliances - can make a huge difference to the performance of a group within a committee in terms of getting policy preferences into legislation, because co-ordinators regularly negotiate with the other groups (Interview-28). They also negotiate with other co-ordinators to assign reports.

Rapporteurs and shadows were also frequently cited as influential⁸⁵; 'you can compare it to the power of ministers in some cases' (Interview-39). An EP official said, 'work hard, become a rapporteur, work hard and then you can push your ideas very, very far. It's very difficult to stop you' (Interview-26). They guide their report through the institutional labyrinth, are likely to be contacted by many interest groups, speak on its behalf, work with expert officials, and have access to meetings with Commission desk officers and perhaps eventually trialogues. Their recommendations are likely to be influential among their committee and group colleagues because everyone recognises that this office provides individuals possessing it with the opportunity to accumulate additional expert and political knowledge. However, it gives individuals the opportunity to shape one report⁸⁶. Co-

⁸⁵ See Judge&Earnshaw:2011, McElroy et al:2011, Costello&Thomson:2010,2011.Høyland:2006, Kaeding:2004, Farrell&Héritier:2004, Rasmussen,A:2005, 2008a, Mamadouh&Raunio:2003, Whitaker:2001.

⁸⁶ One MEP suggested that 'if you can do the play you have much more space as a shadow' because rapporteurs have to be 'nice' to everybody (Interview-42).

ordinators are able to routinely exert influence for the entire legislature and the group's reputation in the committee.

Co-ordinators allocate reports, negotiating within the confines of the D'Hondt procedure; 'it's just a question of agreement between the three or four of us, you know' (Interview-31). Many spoke positively of the camaraderie among them (e.g. Interviews-28,45):

'There is a very strong sense of camaraderie between coordinators who work together and meet together quite often and there's a very good atmosphere, a lot more is give and take ... We are represented as though we are equals and the chemistry that means for the smaller groups and there are opportunities for sharing' (Interview-41).

It is their job to get 'interesting' reports for their group and then assign them among their MEPs⁸⁷ (Interview-31,12). Co-ordinators described their role as 'being a bird with a nest of hungry chicks and my job is to keep flying ... and come back with worms ... because they're hungry for more' (Interview-41) and that dividing reports is a way of 'keeping your group sweet, hand out as many sweets as you can engineer' because then it is easier to bring them together in votes (Interview-28). Others said, 'I try to find out which dossiers are interesting for whom, how I can really keep everybody busy and make everybody content' (Interview-31) and that it is important to create a good atmosphere because a team is 'stronger and more reliable' if people are satisfied which is crucial for negotiating with other groups in committee; '... create this atmosphere, a team, and also supporting them to get Opinions, rewards, to get as much as possible, to feel that they can also influence' (Interview-40). Keeping the group cohesive in committee is important because, 'as the coordinator ... you are using the weight of the group ... it depends if you can get them to vote when it comes to that bit' (Interview-28). Here again cohesion is seen as a form of capital with which to exert influence and play the game successfully.

Comparing observations of different *prep* meetings and co-ordinators' accounts of how they conduct their role, suggests that some take a more consensual and transparent approach to this task than others. Through it, co-ordinators can influence outcomes because they can compare potential candidates from other groups, such as whether they have a more European or national point of view (Interview-31). Another said their distribution of reports is 'absolutely strategic' and that they look at how compromising

⁸⁷ Whilst MEPs fight over some reports, there are others where no one wants to be the shadow and the co-ordinator may have to take this role (Interviews-39,31).

MEPs are likely to be for reports to avoid amendments and that sometimes targets have to be let go when it appears other groups' candidates can 'handle' reports better because 'we have this strategic function to organise the life of the committee' (Interview-44). As one co-ordinator expressed it, of course they are 'mightier than the others because you know a bit more earlier than the others, so you can influence the direction your group goes in the committee' (Interview-31). However, the degree to which a co-ordinator can exert influence depends on how they use this capital in practice. Co-ordinators can exert influence if they are 'very serious' about their work (Interview-27) and it depends 'how interventionist they are, how much they poke their finger in every single dossier, and how much they let people get on' (Interview-29).

A co-ordinator's capacity to exert influence stems from the *pivotal* nature of this role, hinging between the committee and group, and because they routinely work closely with their counterparts from other groups. A second office widely cited as influential was 'group leader' where actors (can) also draw on the opportunity to routinely negotiate with their counterparts from other groups in the Conference of Presidents. These MEPs play an important *steering* role. Asked to identify influential actors, MEPs said, 'of course, it is the Conference of Presidents ... this is really *the* most important political steering organ of the EP' (Interview-32) and that 'the bureau is theoretically a senior part of the EP but in reality all the political decisions are taken by the *cop*' (Interview-48). The Conference seems to play a *steering* role the EP is otherwise missing.

Group leaders were often cited as influential within their group and the Conference, where they routinely meet, was often cited as an influential decision-making body in the EP. The Conference is designated administrative tasks, it 'shall take decisions on the organisation of Parliament's work and matters relating to legislative planning' (Rule 25:2). In particular it drafts the plenary agenda⁸⁸, although negotiation is done first by the group secretariats and then the leaders discuss 'delicate' issues; 'it's so political because it's recorded ... it's part of the history' (Interview-53). Officials described how the Conference is prepared by the EP and group secretary generals who settle non-controversial issues (A-points) while controversial B-Points are left for discussion and decision by the group leaders, which is often the plenary agenda (Interviews-26,47,49,53,57).

⁸⁸ This can of course be 'eminently political' (Interview-47), and an MEP described how he thought the Conference had pushed a particular vote down the agenda so that less MEPs would be present in the chamber (Interview-48).

Rule 25 also designates responsibility for ‘matters relating to relations with the other institutions and bodies of the EU’ (25:3). Interviewees suggested the Conference has begun to play an increasingly ‘political’ role with reference to this duty:

‘... in the Conference there is a kind of club sentiment, we have to listen, we have to fix the Strasbourg agenda, we have to fix relations with Council ... [it] now has a more serious job than in the past, it meets more regularly and its agenda is more political ... It has a clear sensitivity in relation to other institutions and that is new since 2004’ (Interview-57)

‘What is new is that the Conference starts to steer, together with the president, the experts in the committee, a specific dossier. We have done it three times this year [...] where we have managed to have an overarching political consensus ... which allowed us very effective negotiations with the others institutions. I think this is a model that has firmly established itself’ (Interview-26).

A member of the ALDE secretariat attributed this growing politicisation to Verhofstadt;

‘it never was very much more than a forum for drawing up the plenary agenda, and agreeing ... mundane issues ... since Verhofstadt arrived ... he wanted to make the Conference much more political ... have more political debates, take positions on issues and to force the institution to be strong in its negotiating position, vis-à-vis the Council in particular; and thereby making full use of its new Lisbon powers ... It has become a far more influential body ... basically strengthening parliament’s position’ (Interview-49).

Whilst the assertion itself requires further research, this quote again demonstrates that how actors harness and employ the capital they accumulate in practice determines how successfully they can exert influence. This applies to the Conference as an actor, and also to individuals within it. An official described one Conference member as ‘a nice guy’ but problematic because they were unable to sum up, and another as prepared, hands on, and proactive (Interview-47). Whether ideas generated and agreements reached in the Conference are seen through ‘also depends on the capacity of the presidents to sell these things to their group, which varies greatly’ (Interview-47). This relates back to the appropriate disposition described in Chapter 4:

‘...someone needs to be able to communicate with people, be a very good negotiator, and speak different languages, makes it easier to communicate, they feel closer to you ... A group leader ... must have a rich political background, and has been in politics for a long time and knows what to say and when to say it, and needs to be a figure of trust’ (Interview-7).

Group leaders are part of the *core group* which routinely influences the decision-making of non-experts, due to their possession of political knowledge, acquired partly by attending

the Conference. This office presents individuals possessing it with the potential to routinely influence proceedings and outcomes, firstly through group meeting speaking patterns, and secondly because they can invite their (shadow) rapporteurs and co-ordinators to their office to strategise, but also these MEPs from other groups – if they have the ‘credibility’ to get them to come (Interviews-47,49). Discussions about this role suggest that an individual’s capacity to maximise the potential of this capital, depends on what other forms of capital they possess and ability to give convincing performances to their group and Conference colleagues. ALDE interviewees repeatedly stressed the capital Guy Verhofstadt possesses, being a former Prime Minister, having attended Council meetings, but also his personality and possession of a specific agenda⁸⁹. In contrast an MEP said another leader’s weak political skills means he would not attribute the cohesion of that group to his leadership (Interview-48):

‘We are the only ones to have a former prime minister who knows how things work in the Council, which is fantastic. Second he’s very clever, very quick so we have all the elements for being the moving party within parliament’ (Interview-44)

‘... it’s Verhofstadt, who, of course is an exceptional figure because of his previous career. His personal style, his experience as prime minister of Belgium and his membership of the European Council for 9 years, this make him far stronger group leader than many others’ (Interview-32)

‘It helps to have a leader ... used to having to do deals ... but who also has an agenda, who’s always thinking tactics, how do we position ALDE as a player’ (Interview-41).

Interviewees also said some offices are not perceived to be influential. For example, quaesters because ‘the problems we have in this house, they have never been solved. I don’t know what they do’ (Interview-42). Another said the Conferences of Committee and Delegation Chairs are not seen as influential because they rarely come to decisions and can be overturned by the Conference of Presidents (Interview-18). Others said the Bureau can only exert influence over administrative rather than political issues; ‘[it] is to do with staff and buildings and administration, it’s also very powerful, it is just a different kind of power’ (Interview-18) and financial decisions have to be made with the budgetary committees (Interview-48). During fieldwork, some assistants questioned why another was taking an issue quite so seriously because his MEP was ‘only’ a shadow rapporteur on a draft Opinion, which one joked is *the lowest of the low*, and tools as well as offices carry varying degrees of prestige.

⁸⁹ An MEP from a small member-state complained that political careers are not taken into account (Interview-37).

More interviewees noted that Vice Presidents (VP) of groups and committees are not perceived to wield influence, ‘...there was a third VP if I wanted to go on that committee, but I didn’t want to be VP of something I have no interest in, it’s a title that means nothing’ (Interview-27), particularly in comparison with co-ordinators who ‘have the beef’ (Interview-44). An MEP stressed that VP in committee or group ‘doesn’t count at all, if you’re talking about influence, it is completely irrelevant, it’s a nice title, and you can sell it at home, but there’s no influence’ (Interview-42). However, he added that one group VP is perceived to be influential because everybody views him as ‘extremely competent’. Whilst formal offices might ‘define the situation for their occupants’ (Jenkins:2002:85), actors can manoeuvre from their position in practice by accumulating other forms of capital. Once the formal offices have been doled out, an alternative strategy is for MEPs to accumulate informal (individual) capital and build a reputation as a hardworking, co-operative specialist.

8.4.2.3 Informal Reputation: hardworking, co-operative specialists

The *core group* secondly consists of MEPs with reputations as hardworking, co-operative specialists (also Chapter 4). After discussing the role of the Conference an MEP added, ‘...but if you’ve been around long enough and know your way around and have a degree of respect, you don’t need to be on any of these to get something done’ (Interview-48, see Whitaker:2001:81). The MEP’s assistant said that Brussels is a place where you need *initiative*, but for those who do, it is a place with a lot of *space* for people to start things, and an MEP said, ‘you can do things here, and influence – some of it is just opportunity, being in the right place, the right time, and some of it is hard work’ (Interview-27).

Whilst discussing who they thought are the most influential MEPs, many interviewees also named specific *active* and *respected* MEPs. As the MEP in the opening vignette said; ‘it is a number of colleagues, who, mostly on merit, really wield influence, because they are ... good at what they do and they are hard-working’ (Interview-32). The individuals repeatedly named were the MEPs I saw speaking regularly in group and committee meetings. The relatively short amount of time MEPs spend per week in Brussels means they need to work hard:

‘be modest and work, here there is no blah, blah. Here nobody knows you ...The only way for you to be respected and to count here, is to do your work properly, to look at problems with a very modest eye, say, well we are in a team, we have to build a team and we have to listen to each other’ (Interview-44).

As discussed in Chapter 4, this ‘team’ approach and being perceived as serious and co-operative are essential dispositions for success within the consensual habitus and in a place where constantly building shifting alliances and making compromises is a fundamental part of the everyday practice of politics. As Scully says, the EP’s institutional complexity and the requirement for absolute majorities, ‘makes compromise and coalition-building a necessity and places a premium on subtle political skills’ which grant individuals possessing them greater scope to achieve substantive policy objectives than their national counterparts (2007:182). An official said, ‘I see that in the discussions ... there is very often a consensus around a person ... who makes the consensus, took care of all the comments and members’ sensitivity ... that is making a member who is respected’ (Interview-53). A reputation as co-operative and a good negotiator can enable an MEP to ‘punch above their weight’ and a lot of success is down to the approach you take to people here (Interview-1). An NI MEP’s assistant explained that once her MEP showed he wanted to work ‘seriously’ and co-operate in the committee, and was not eurosceptic, the other MEPs were willing to work with him (Interview-56).

For MEPs working in the committees, a reputation as a specialist (beyond a single rapporteurship) can be an important way to ‘shape ... the way in which majorities go’ (Interview-1) – through committee work and providing expertise to non-experts (Chapter 7). Co-ordinators and committee staff said expertise and how ‘active’ an MEP is are an important part of the discussion when allocating reports, within the D’Hondt confines (Interviews-12,39,51); ‘when you are small you have to develop the strategy of developing really strategic targets, using the competencies that you have in your group. If you have someone who is ... recognised as an expert, or has already been working on the issue before in parliament, it helps’ (Interview-44).

MEPs trust in and rely on each others’ work and expertise, valid capital and an important strategy for those seeking to influence processes and outcomes. An MEP described how when trying to influence a particular issue, ‘the notorious rebels ... are nice to work with because they share your conviction, but they are also weak links ...you’re looking for someone who can carry respect’ (Interview-41). As detailed in Chapter 5, committing to

and focusing on a narrow range of issues to develop a reputation as a specialist within this small transnational community is a strategy available to individuals, due to the highly technical nature of EU legislation and particular (work) context MEPs face. This reputation may be kick started with previous career experience but can be built from scratch.

These three dispositions are particular to the way this political field has developed historically. MEPs need to be hard-working because of its transnational nature, co-operative (partly) because of the lack of a permanent majority, and a specialist due to the technical nature of EU legislature and the work context. The *core group's* capacity to exert influence is reinforced by a more mundane factor. Committee and group meetings are never full. Committees sometimes seem to have more staff, visitors, and press than MEPs. There is steady movement in and out of the room as assistants consult the agenda in advance and MEPs (can) attend only the parts of meetings they are interested in. It is frequently the same MEPs speaking in group and committee and some never attend (see Neuhold&Dobbels:2012). As we have seen, these are important sites for expert MEPs to influence processes and outcomes. As Høyland and Hermansen (2011) used Woody Allen's quote to suggest, '80% of success is showing up', and they show that MEPs who attend committee and plenary regularly are awarded, and rewarded, rapporteurships.

8.4.2.4 Reproduction of the Core Group

The core group may be reproduced through socialisation practices and strategies followed in the field as actors gain a feel for the game and reproduce social reality by acting on their interpretations of the meanings generated around structures. The study of micro-sociological practices can reveal how power structures are reproduced in practice (Webb et al:2002:36). Bourdieu's work on marriage strategies may prove insightful here. Societies reproduce themselves and tend to maintain institutional forms intact as members leave, arrive, and are acculturated. Families, the level at which social reproduction takes place, pursue marriage strategies to do the best they can with their hand (Bourdieu:2002). Rather than a structural rule behind marriage exchange, Bourdieu found the real dynamic was strategy; the Kabyles' practical knowledge and implicit sense of what is possible given their family's circumstances and status. This insight is perhaps best conveyed in Bourdieu's writing on Béarn marriage strategies (1990:143-199). 'Strategy' accounts for practice where the habitus and structures meet. Lane (2000:106) says Bourdieu was ambiguous about the

extent to which marriage strategies are conscious choices or the result of practical sense, but lead to the reproduction of existing social structures (Lane:2000, Calhoun:2000, Bourdieu:1977). This ambiguity is actually helpful in the analysis of the EP's core group.

MEPs learn how to play the game and their role successfully on the job. It takes time, but newcomers gain a feel for the game by experiencing what behaviour is more likely to lead to success in the field, and perhaps by making faux-pas' along the way (Chapter 4). As described, when asked how to be or what makes an effective MEP, some MEPs described a *route* which involves getting on a committee you are interested in (so you can specialise), becoming a shadow, rapporteur, then committee chair or gaining a group office (NPD leader or co-ordinator) (Interviews-18,28,32,35,39,45,52) – although individuals possessing large amounts of valid capital may be able to shortcut this (career) pathway; e.g. Verhofstadt (see Guy Verhofstadt: Who is Guy).

A former senior official said, 'the routes up the ladder usually favour conventional approaches' (Interview-35). Particularly for MEPs pursuing a European career, the advice above outlines a strategy for career success, which is reflected in the pathways of the current leaders of the three largest groups (Interview-35). MEPs are increasingly professional politicians for whom the EP is a full-time job and long-term career, rather than retirement home or training ground (Taggart&Bale:2006, Scully:2007:180). As discussed in Chapter 5, MEPs consciously and unconsciously develop strategies to cope with their work context, and the practice many follow – specialising and seeking offices - also reproduces power structures in this field. By following the conventional route, MEPs reproduce the influence of the core group in each legislature through their practice and strategies. As Fowler says, practice tends to reproduce the social order because accumulation of capital tends to enhance individuals' ambition (2001:321).

8.5 A Two-Level Playing Field

The *core group* consists of MEPs who have accumulated valid delegated and individual capital – particular formal offices and informal reputations. This distinction, and discussions with interviewees about how MEPs perform their role and pursue their interests inside the EP, indicate that rather than a level playing field – as some participants' accounts of the habitus might suggest – the EP can be better understood as a (playing) field

with two levels. Exploration of what individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics inside the EP consists of, suggests the field can be understood to have a political and legislative sub-field. The EP's position in the EU super-field means a consensual approach to politics is vital for success in both sub-fields.

8.5.1 The Political and Legislative Sub-Fields

Most interviewees described the EP as a co-operative and inclusive place where there are many opportunities for individuals to make a difference, and exert influence, if they gain a feel for the game and are prepared to put in the hard work and accumulate valid capital. These accounts give a sense of the EP as a level playing field. However, as discussed, interviewees went on to repeatedly reveal particular MEPs as being perceived to be more influential, particularly co-ordinators and group leaders. From these discussions, and others about the strategies MEPs employ to be effective, another insight emerged. The stories told by interviewees about the ways in which the Conference and co-ordinators are able to exert influence in processes and over outcomes, reflects a division in the field between a political and legislative sub-field. Different everyday activities are carried out by MEPs operating in each of these sub-fields:

‘the rapporteur has the most influence on his dossier ... But if you are the group leadership, then you have a big ability to influence the bigger picture. So that's the question: are you interested in specific legislation, to drive it forward, or if you are more interested in the big picture then you should try and become part of the group leadership as you can then drive that much more effectively' (Interview-26).

As an MEP said, ‘there are two different lots of politics being played here, the stuff around the work we do and the policy stuff, but there's also the politics of who's top dog' (Interview-28). He referred to MEPs working in the legislative sub-field as ‘we’, identifying with them and differentiating them from MEPs operating in the political sub-field. Whilst focusing on a narrow range of issues in the committees and building a reputation as a specialist is important for some MEPs, as the MEP in the opening vignette explained, you do not need to do this if you are in the group leaderships, where MEPs steer processes (Interview-32).

The political sub-field is occupied by MEPs possessing EP and group leadership positions (e.g. EP president, group leaders, vice presidents, and NPD leaders), and the legislative sub-

field is occupied by MEPs working daily on the detail of EU legislation (e.g. co-ordinators, rapporteurs, shadows, and regular committee members). The meetings they routinely attend, actors they regularly interact with, and the everyday tasks and activities they engage in, mean that MEPs in the legislative sub-field accumulate large amounts of expert knowledge and MEPs operating in the political sub-field are able to accumulate varying amounts of political knowledge. In the voting list construction process, these MEPs are therefore perceived as legislative and political experts, possessing legislative and political expertise respectively - and are potentially able to harness this in the performances they give to less- or non- expert colleagues to convince them to follow their recommendations (see Ringe&Victor:2013).

Bleed-through between these sub-fields occurs and they are not mutually exclusive. MEPs can occupy positions in both (e.g. if a VP is a rapporteur) and co-ordinators play an important hinging role as they meet with legislative experts in *prep* meetings but also regularly with a group VP (Interview-32) and with their counterparts from other groups. Perhaps most importantly, inhabitants of these two sub-fields meet routinely and discuss progress and negotiate positions, notably when rapporteurs present their work to group colleagues and the leader advises their group during the construction of voting lists. What is also important to note is that key players from both sub-fields, leaders and co-ordinators, are perceived to be (most) influential in this field. This firstly adds to the diffusion of influence. It also reinforces the importance of both the committees and groups as the two key organisational elements inside the EP. Neither fully dominates the other because both play key but different roles at different stages of the game. As an MEP said, 'they all have their spheres of influence' (Interview-27) and 'there, basically, are 20% of MEPs who make the place work ... a minority of members who are the active people who make the place function. You have another 20-25, 30-40% who do the work. They do their committees, their amendments, but they are not part of the driving force' (Interview-47).

I found that MEPs and assistants operating in the legislative sub-field sometimes have little knowledge about what MEPs in political sub-field do:

'The Conference I know nothing about, you would have to talk to somebody who knows about that. I know they exist and I know they meet, and I know they take decisions, the bigger decisions shall we say, but equally the detail can be as important in this place' (Interview-27).

However these MEPs were extremely knowledgeable about their committee work. Some of them showed little interest in gaining a position in the political sub-field and were instead concerned with shaping legislation in their committees:

‘...for me the important thing is the work ...I don't have a [group] post and I like it that way ... If you want to become the group president or vice president, and all this is very important to you then - but that's not very important to me, I just want to do my job and do my directives' (Interview-45)

‘You can chose whether you want to become involved in that, but I am not terribly keen, being leader of the delegation, the group and so on’ (Interview-28).

However others see committee work as a step on a (career) ladder aimed towards the political sub-field, and therefore almost as an apprenticeship period⁹⁰. MEPs positioned in the political sub-field were well versed in the demands of the legislative sub-field and had usually previously occupied positions within it, suggesting further evidence that MEPs are expected to do an apprenticeship period in the legislative sub-field, (unless they possess the capital to circumvent the route) to prove themselves and demonstrate their abilities and commitment, and perhaps also values, before they are perceived as competent and embodying the appropriate disposition to move into the political sub-field and steer processes for their group or the institution. MEPs can therefore be understood to be on different career trajectories within the field and to have different motivations for strategies.

8.5.2 The EU Super-Field

Whilst MEPs occupying and working in each of these sub-fields time consists of different activities, a co-operative approach to the practice of politics and colleagues is crucial for success in both; ‘there is a sense in all the bodies of all the main groups that the only way we can go forward for this institution is through cooperation’ (Interview-57). The historical development of the EU and the wider institutional context in which the EP is situated and finds itself, has shaped the field and its habitus. The EP’s historical position in the EU ‘super-field’ (Kauppi:2011:154) has contributed to the consensus culture and two-level field which have emerged. An MEP, ruminating on how he finds the extent of the consensus culture surprising, expressed this when saying:

⁹⁰ Matthews (1960) describes an unwritten code in US Senate that freshmen must serve an apprenticeship period where they receive tasks veteran senators don’t want, are to be seen and not heard in the senate, have to respect elders, and actively seek out guidance if they want to progress. They learn the legislative code that show-horses get in the media but work-horses gain the respect of colleagues (1960:93-4).

‘...it’s quite unique that you have this consensus parliament. The reason why we make broad compromises is that we know in this House that we have no influence if we don’t because our counterpart is the Commission and the Council and if we don’t have a broad majority, well they just tell us, well you don’t agree anyway in the parliament so go to hell with your papers’ (Interview-42).

The requirement for consensus is apparent in the legislative sub-field where the need to consider the EP’s position vis-à-vis the other institutions encourages co-operation, and consensus building. A co-ordinator expressed this when she said they divide the reports in a sensitive way to strengthen the role of the EP as a whole:

‘... because we know that from the outside we are not just seen as ALDE, either the parliament has an influence or we lose collectively, so it’s always a strange game between defending our political visions, and at the same time entering a logic of co-operation with the others’ (Interview-44).

However this logic is more apparent in the political sub-field, as illustrated in these quotes about the Conference:

‘it is a very strange body really...for the preparation of certain strategic political decisions...it can’t stray too far...but there is of course the particular European aspect to consider, this parliament is an institution in the institutional triangle; the consensus based approach and the requirement for a qualified majority in the second readings, *forces*, really *forces* at least the centre of this house to co-operate...it’s only natural, that’s the set up, the treaty based set up of this parliament, and that in my view, explains and justifies the existence of the *cop*’ (Interview-32)

‘A lot of this Conference stuff ... is tactical to some extent. You know like “how should the parliament place itself within the debate” (Interview-47).

Whilst the political groups often fight along ideological lines, interviewees suggested that there are times when MEPs prioritise their role as members of this institution and its historical position in the triangle (see also Ripoll Servent:2013):

‘... the culture of the place is determined by its history. You have to recognise where the parliament started from, from being the Mickey Mouse parliament which was just a talking shop, ... generally disregarded by the other institutions, that the Commission had to deal with everything, and the Council didn’t really have to deal with it. That’s the background that has affected so much of the parliamentary thinking and the way in which people behave ... everything really revolved around whether or not, whatever course of action was taken, would actually increase the role and powers of the parliament ... there has been this continuous and extraordinary struggle to get parliament powers, and that’s almost the act of faith for everybody involved in the institution’ (Interview-35)

‘... there’s quite a strong sense of the EP being united against sometimes the Council or the Commission ... there is a strong feeling right across the political groups that we want to be treated with respect and we want to have our say on different issues, and you can get quite strong majorities there around feelings that the Council hasn’t properly explained its position, or it hasn’t waited for the EP to make its decision ... we want the other institutions to take the parliament seriously’ (Interview-1).

8.5.3 The Doxa

The groups play a vital role in MEPs’ ‘normal’ decision-making process (Chapter 7). However, interviews suggest MEPs also consider their role as members of this institution and there may be times when they prioritise the EP’s institutional identity. A former senior official said, ‘the biggest insult that you can make about a political leader, particularly the president, is that he hasn’t stood up for the parliament’s rights enough. That transcends political boundaries, and that transcends to a certain extent, the pro and eurosceptic divide’ (Interview-35). As a group official said, ‘...it is important the three chairpersons know what the objective is to have a strong parliament position for Council, so we need to unite on this. They will then each, hopefully, urge or cajole their groups into accepting these proposals. That is all part of the politics’ (Interview-49). Examples of grand multi-party coalitions include during the SWIFT agreement, delaying the vote on the External Action Service, and for legislation capping bankers’ bonuses. The internal impact of the EP’s collective institutional identity has been explored by other scholars (see McElroy:2006:179, Farrell&Héritier:2004, Ripoll Servent:2013,2012, Ripoll Servent&MacKenzie:2011). This idea resonates with what Parker has said about organisations more broadly, that ‘organizational cultures should be seen as fragmented unities in which members identify themselves as collective at some times and divided at others ... [it] should be understood as involving both the everyday understandings of members and the more general features of the sector, state and society’ (2000:1).

MEPs are actors ‘faced with cross-cutting multiple identities ... they also have an institutional identity fashioned by the decision rules of the Union that force the EP to negotiate with the Council on legislative output’ (Laffan:2004:94). As an official said, ‘the fact that it is a compromise seeking parliament, is because we have to reconcile so many different interests in order to establish a strong negotiating position with the other institutions’ (Interview-49). Over lunch, a lobbyist told me I had come to the EP at an interesting time. Since Lisbon he had noticed MEPs becoming more confident in their relations with the other institutions. One role which is fundamental to the identity of

participants in this field is the EP's institutional identity in relation to the other EU institutions. This has been crucial in the EP's long quest for power (Priestley:2008) where a collective institutional interest has been apparent. Ripoll Servent says, 'this overall objective is at the core of the institutional preferences of the EP and thus works as the normative point of reference. Obviously policy preferences vary...however, they will have fewer chances to succeed if they contradict this primary institutional interest' (2011:8). As discussed above, a number of interviewees eluded to ways in which the internal dynamics of the EP and actors' behaviour are shaped by the EP's (historical) position in the EU triangle and to complete an earlier quotation, an MEP said; 'there are two different lots of politics being played here, the stuff around the work we do and the policy stuff, but there's also the politics of who's top dog in this place, the agenda the pro-Europeans have, how do we get more power for the parliament' (Interview-28).

Ethnography has revealed taken-for-granted practices which participants do not regard worth commenting on, even though they shape the practice of politics (see Mundell:2010). This is essential when exploring the doxa, an institution's unarticulated *sens pratique*. The doxa is the 'fundamental truth which makes co-operation meaningful for the actors within the context' (Adler-Nissen:2009:97). The first generation of research on MEP behaviour sought to determine the variable which most reliably predicts MEPs' voting behaviour and explains outcomes. However, immersion in the field, observing daily activities, mundane routines, and backstage preparations, revealed that in (their) practice MEPs embody and negotiate a myriad of interests and perform multiple roles on a monthly, daily and even hourly basis (Chapter 5). Co-operation at the everyday level among actors in this field is meaningful, and possible, because they all embody this complex task, pursuing their particular aims whilst balancing numerous interests, negotiating conflicts and contradictions, and thus performing multiple roles in this transnational space. Ethnography embraces rather than bypasses this complexity in its analysis of MEP behaviour and reminds us that behaviour should be analysed and understood in context, in the broadest sense of this term, as is appropriate to the setting.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the EP as a transnational political field in which MEPs are positioned. I have argued that MEPs accumulate capital and harness its potential from their

position to successfully convince and persuade other actors to follow their recommendations. This chapter has investigated the valid types of capital and strategies available to play the game successfully within the habitus. The diffusion of influence in the EP means there are many opportunities for individual MEPs to shape processes and outcomes - if they gain a feel for the game and acquire the appropriate disposition and accumulate valid capital.

The following findings have been presented. Influence is diffused widely in the EP. No government arises from this legislature and there is no clear centre. The President plays a speaker role and leadership does not come from the executive or one group. Influence is further dispersed in the strong committee system and within the groups, none of which has a majority. Bourdieu's thinking tools have helped us understand this messy social situation. Power structures exist and have effects because actors are embedded and act from their position within them. This approach helps us analyse the dynamic behaviour of active agents within structures.

Interviewees repeatedly described the habitus as consensual, co-operative, egalitarian, inclusive and the EP therefore as an enabling institution. However, certain MEPs were repeatedly identified as perceived to be more influential. This *core group* consists of individuals who have accumulated delegated and individual capital. These MEPs possess formal offices which enable them to play a pivotal role between the committees and groups (co-ordinators) or to steer processes (group leaders). Others command respect by building an informal reputation as a hardworking, co-operative specialist and therefore are seen as experts by their colleagues regardless of whether they currently hold an office. This core group is reproduced through socialisation practices and the strategies MEPs employ and the route they follow to themselves exert influence.

The analysis of the capital and strategies available indicates that rather than a level playing field, the EP can be better understood as a field with two levels, a political and legislative sub-field. MEPs' activities in these sub-fields enable them to accumulate political and legislative expertise respectively and to potentially harness this to convince non-expert colleagues to follow their recommendations. However, a co-operative approach is vital for success in both sub-fields due to the EP's historical position in the EU superfield. Whilst the political groups play a key role, interviewees suggested MEPs also consider their role as

members of this institution vis-à-vis the other institutions and the EP's reputation. This is crucial to the identity of members of this field. The doxa is perhaps that all MEPs are engaged in a daily struggle to balance a myriad of interests and perform multiple roles. They must negotiate these contradictions in their everyday practice of politics in this context. MEPs' performance of multiple roles is discussed further in the following Conclusion, along with other overarching themes emerging from this study. It is important we increase our understanding of where, how, and by who influence is exerted inside this institution to be better able to hold our legislators to account, which is part of the rationale for this research.

Chapter 9: Conclusion:

Complexity and Banality: the everyday practice of politics inside the European Parliament

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has got closer to MEPs as actors doing politics and their perspective, in order to bring actors, agency, and social context into the study of MEP behaviour. It has primarily explored **how individual MEPs practice European politics at the everyday level inside the EP**. The study has approached politics as an activity performed on a daily basis by individuals within particular social spaces. It has taken an ethnographic approach in order to provide a deeper, more nuanced, and more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour - as the everyday practice of politics – than is currently available in the European Studies literature. By exploring MEP behaviour in this way, the thesis has shed light on the role of the group in MEPs' everyday practice of politics and the local meanings generated around these structures. It has also explored three inter-related research issues: how MEPs decide how to vote, perform multiple roles, and the opportunities and constraints they face. The project has produced a dense bricolage and this concluding chapter now draws out the key findings. The conclusion briefly reviews the research rationale and approach, summarises the empirical findings, and then discusses the research question, research issues, and key messages before finally clarifying the project's contribution.

9.2 Review: Rationale and Approach

This thesis has responded to two rationales. Firstly, it responds to a gap in the European Studies literature which lacks a holistic understanding of MEP behaviour as a social practice conducted by active agents. Statistical studies have gone a long way in explaining MEPs' voting behaviour, repeatedly identifying the explanatory power of the group and NPD variables. However this work takes a narrow approach to MEP behaviour as plenary voting. Meanwhile the extensive collection of research on MEP behaviour which takes a broader range of theoretical and methodological approaches is fragmented and has taken a fragmented approach to the phenomenon, focusing on issues and processes occurring in particular internal structures. However we know less about how MEPs practice politics inside this institution at the everyday level as a social activity; less about the links between

MEPs, the committees, groups, and NPDs; the mechanisms through which the relationships between them work; and about how influence is exercised by these actors (Yordanova:2011:608, Coman:2009). We know little about backstage pre-plenary processes occurring inside the EP and what the everyday practice of politics and this profession consists of. We also know less about how group cohesion is achieved and the local meanings generated around these structures and agents' dynamic interactions with them.

This project was secondly motivated by a wider lack of knowledge about what MEPs do in Brussels and has aimed to de-mystify this profession. Haller (2008) has argued EU elites and citizens are increasingly living in two different worlds and that the difficulty of seeing who is responsible for decisions is one of the reasons for this growing split. Knowing who is responsible for outcomes is a key component of accountability and this research has responded to a need for more research on how and where decisions are taken in the EP. It has aimed to open up this institutional black-box and illuminate processes occurring inside. It has endeavoured to paint an accessible picture of this profession by exploring 'politics as usual'. The focus on daily routines has revealed the simultaneous complexity and banality of the everyday practice of politics by MEPs in Brussels (Wodak:2009:206).

This inter-disciplinary European Studies thesis has combined tools from Political Science and Anthropology to bring actors, agency, and social context into the study of MEP behaviour (see Ripoll Servent&Busby:2013). An ethnographic approach and three qualitative methods (participant observation, elite interviews, and a survey) have enabled me to collect detailed data about the everyday practice of politics by MEPs from the local perspective. This data has been analysed through a theoretical lens combining thinking tools from Goffman (1959), Wenger et al (2002), and Bourdieu (1990, 1977) which was inspired by Wodak (2009) and Adler-Nissen's (2009) recent applications of these tools. The framework differentiates between frontstage performances and backstage preparations and conceptualises the EP as a transnational political field with a particular habitus in which politics is practiced. The lens elucidates dynamic interactions between structures and agents by conceptualising the NPDs and groups as CoPs and by exploring politics as an activity conducted in particular social spaces. By rejecting reductionism, this study has produced a deeper and more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour. As Schatz says, the study of politics with insufficient space for ethnography is an 'impoverished' affair (2009:10). The key empirical findings from Chapters 4-8 are summarised below.

9.3 Summary: Empirical Findings

Chapter 4 explored the *Brussels Bubble*; the field and habitus in which politics is practiced. It argued that MEPs learn to play the game being played in this transnational political field in order to pursue their aims and interests successfully. It takes time for new MEPs to learn the rules of the game, acquire the appropriate disposition, and accumulate valid capital. The habitus is described as consensual, enabling, egalitarian, and inclusive by and for those who develop a feel for the game. For MEPs primarily wanting to shape EU legislation and EP politics - which not all MEPs do - there are many opportunities available if the appropriate disposition is acquired. MEPs develop a feel for the game informally through participation but the groups and NPDs play a key role in socialising newcomers into the habitus.

Chapter 5 examined everyday life in the MEP office; it described activities and routines occurring in this backstage region where frontstage performances are prepared and strategies planned. It argued that MEPs employ particular everyday strategies to cope with the particular work environment they face. This work-context is characterised by constant movement, shortage of time, information overload, technical information, and bureaucracy. MEPs' coping strategies can include focusing on and specialising in a narrow range of highly technical issues which usually relate to their committee(s) and then re-contextualising these in different backstage CoPs. MEPs can also accumulate knowledge by employing trusted assistants, developing a wide knowledge network, and by regularly exchanging knowledge with trusted NPD and group colleagues who act as their *first port of call*. Mundane office activities and routines then prepare MEPs to give credible and thus persuasive performances to different audiences for whom they wear different masks.

Chapter 6 further investigated the role of the MEP assistants; it described their activities, sources of knowledge, and communication and social practices. It argued that assistants act as an information interface within the office space by gate-keeping, filtering the information overload, tailoring information, and routinely interfacing with the NPD and group to help their MEP practice politics more successfully. An assistant's level of competence can therefore affect an MEP's performances. As well as assistants also building networks from where they obtain knowledge, they routinely turn to other assistants from their NPD and group for information and advice. The NPD and group are therefore regular sources of the knowledge assistants routinely provide MEPs with.

Chapter 7 built on Ringe's (2010) Perceived Preference Coherence (PPC) mechanism and further explored the role of the group in MEPs' everyday practice of politics. It described the backstage process of voting list construction and MEPs' dynamic interactions with these structures. The chapter argued that conceptualising the group as a CoP can help us understand the role these structures play in MEPs' daily endeavour and decision-making processes. Routine knowledge sharing practices help members of a CoP to pursue its domain. This chapter brought together the key narrative woven so far, that the NPD and group structures play a crucial support role in MEPs' everyday practice of politics inside the EP as their *first port of call* for knowledge in areas in which they are non-experts. The (mainstream centre) groups function as collegial CoPs where knowledge is routinely exchanged to help MEPs to cope with the work environment they face, to decide how to vote, and to focus on strategically pursuing their particular aims and interests.

Chapter 8 analysed the EP as a transnational political field in which MEPs are positioned. It investigated this system of power-related positions, the valid types of capital available for accumulation, and strategies employed by actors to pursue their interests in the habitus and doxa - the context in which MEPs practice politics. It argued that MEPs accumulate particular types of individual and delegated capital in order to persuade others players in the field to follow their recommendations. Influence is diffused widely and there are many opportunities for individual MEPs to shape EP politics and EU legislation, if they learn to play the game, acquire the habitus, and accumulate valid capital. Although the habitus is frequently described as consensual and egalitarian, a *core group* of MEPs was repeatedly identified as more influential than others. The core group includes *pivotal* co-ordinators, *steering* group leaders, and MEPs possessing reputations as respected hardworking, co-operative specialists. Rather than as a level playing field, the EP is therefore better understood as a field with two levels; a legislative and political sub-field. A co-operative approach to politics and colleagues is vital for success in both sub-fields due to the EP's historic position in the EU super-field. This chapter has shown that in order to gain a deeper understanding of MEP behaviour, the phenomenon must be explored in context, in the broadest sense of the term.

9.4 Discussion

9.4.1 The Research Question

Ethnography's actor-centred and context-sensitive approach has enabled me to explore how individual MEPs practice politics at the everyday level inside the EP. I explored participants' perspective and views on how politics is practiced as an activity in this particular social space. The key narrative woven throughout this thesis has concerned the role of the NPD and group structures in MEPs' everyday practice of politics from the local perspective. I have argued that these structures can fruitfully be conceptualised as CoPs (Wenger et al:2002) to help us understand how MEPs practice politics inside this institution on a daily basis. The collegial political groups consist of a community of people who care about pursuing their domain and the practice they create in order to achieve this. Members share concerns and exchange knowledge on a regular basis to further their common domain and they find value in their interactions with these trusted colleagues.

This thesis has explored how and why the NPDs and groups play an important role inside the EP. It has found that these structures play a vital support role for members inside the institution. They routinely provide support to individual MEPs to help them cope with the particular work environment they face, described in Chapter 5. Starting from the MEP office epicentre, NPD and then group colleagues serve as the *first port of call* for MEPs and assistants for knowledge in policy areas on which they do not focus and do not specialise in. Whilst MEPs may also acquire knowledge from a range of other sources (e.g. their national party, Permanent Representation, and interest groups), it is important to grasp the taken-for-granted role these structures play in routinely providing MEPs with information and advice to do their job and make decisions, particularly during group *weeks*.

In this way, the NPD and group routinely support individual MEPs' everyday practice of politics. Their knowledge sharing dynamic allows individual MEPs to focus on their particular chosen (policy and/or political) aims and interests. It allows them to focus their limited time and activities and efforts on pursuing these often highly technical issues, whilst relying on trusted colleagues in other areas which they do not have time to focus on. This knowledge sharing dynamic, which facilitates specialisation, helps MEPs to strategically pursue their own aims and interests and simultaneously the CoP to pursue its common domain more effectively. This dynamic also helps MEPs to make informed voting decisions and this point is expanded upon below. The inductive ethnographic approach taken and theoretical framework employed in this thesis have provided these insights by

enabling me to explore the dynamic interactions between structures and agents in this particular context and the local meanings generated around structures.

9.4.2 The Research Issues

This project has also addressed the following three inter-connected research issues relating to MEP behaviour.

9.4.2.1 How do MEPs (normally) decide how to vote?

The narrative developed throughout this thesis has conveyed the supportive role the NPD and group structures play in MEPs' everyday practice of politics and decision-making process. Conceptualising them as collegial CoPs helps us to understand the role these structures play in MEPs' daily endeavour. The work environment MEPs face is characterised by constant movement, shortage of time, information overload, highly technical information, and bureaucracy. MEPs develop particular strategies to cope, such as organising their time and activities to focus on and specialise in a narrow range of often highly technical policy and/or political issues, which usually relate to their committee(s). MEPs then re-contextualise these interests in their performances given to different backstage audiences, to convince other actors to follow their recommendations in these areas. MEPs also accumulate knowledge to help with the pursuit of their interests by employing trusted assistants to organise their limited time around these interests. Assistants also retrieve and tailor relevant knowledge to prepare their MEP to give credible and thus persuasive performances. They filter the information overload so MEPs can focus on influencing activity in their specialist area(s). MEPs and assistants then regularly turn to their NPD and group colleagues for information and advice in their non-expert areas. MEPs routinely follow their group's voting advice and lists because they cannot know the detail of every report and the hundreds of amendments they vote on in each plenary week, but trust that controversial issues will have been raised by the voting list construction routine described in Chapter 7.

This research concurs with Ringe's (2010) theory that resource short MEPs 'normally' follow the (committee) experts from their group, with whom they share PPC, in their non-expert areas, but that 'invested' MEPs may not blindly follow their advice. Ringe's

mechanism shows how MEPs make decisions under conditions of uncertainty and information asymmetry while maintaining democratic accountability because the group label acts as an efficient and reliable decision-making shortcut (2010:12,44). I have built on Ringe's finding by exploring how this mechanism operates at the everyday level, through the routine process of voting list construction.

MEPs' time and activities are strictly structured by the EP calendar whose four-week cycle facilitates and reinforces this dynamic. MEPs gain expertise during committee *week* through committee activities, events, and meeting interest groups. In the following group *week*, they routinely receive updates and advice from their NPD and group experts on other committees and update these colleagues on their own area(s). Group *week* consists of a meeting routine which acts as an 'early warning system' for the group presidency. NPDs discuss issues which might be controversial in their member-state or regions. NPD meetings are therefore a key site in which MEPs' multiple roles are negotiated. Controversial issues are then brought to the Working Groups and if they cannot be resolved, to the following group meeting where the voting list is discussed and finalised. MEPs often then follow this voting list, or hand signals from their (shadow) rapporteur, because they trust that controversial issues have been raised and debated during the list construction process. In group meetings, the core group advises non-expert MEPs on how to vote. For 'invested' MEPs, these experts must give credible performances to persuade them and to be able to therefore shape the group line.

By starting from an individual MEP's perspective, taking constraints seriously, and exploring backstage routines and actors' dynamic interactions with these structures, we can understand the role the group plays in MEPs' voting behaviour more deeply. Exploring knowledge sharing practices also begins to help us understand how the groups achieve the surprisingly high levels of cohesion other studies have identified, despite their structural weaknesses (see Hix et al:2007). Organisations must be unpacked and components theorised because the extent EU institutions impinge upon actors depends on how they are organized (Egeberg:2002). Firstly, MEPs follow the voting list because they do not have the resources to check every technical amendment and trust that controversial issues have been raised by the construction routine. Secondly, NPDs usually alert the group in advance if they want to defect because they know cohesion is essential capital for a group to be perceived as a serious player in the political game, so that other groups will make deals and

coalitions with them, to influence outcomes. MEPs multiple roles are routinely negotiated during the voting list construction routine and over the course of the EP's monthly cycle.

9.4.2.2 How do MEPs perform multiple roles?

This thesis has also explored how MEPs perform multiple roles at the everyday level. Some scholars interested in MEP behaviour have constructed mutually exclusive role typologies to explain MEP behaviour (Taggart&Bale:2006). Some others have been concerned with identifying which variable has the most power to explain voting behaviour (e.g. Hix et al:2007). However I argue that, firstly, these approaches over-simplify a complex reality. By eschewing reductionism, ethnography enables us to explore how MEPs perform multiple roles at the everyday level and hence to gain a more nuanced understanding of MEP behaviour⁹¹. Secondly, I argue that this is important to grasp because, whilst we all live in a nexus of multi-memberships (Wenger:1998:158), multiple roles are particularly pronounced in the EP, compared with national parliaments, because MEPs have more roles to negotiate which vie for their time and attention, and which can conflict with each other during decision-making. As Abélès says, MEPs' dual function produces effects because it is the paradox at the heart of the EP system (1993:11).

The EP calendar is an ubiquitous artefact found in every office and often in the lanyards worn by staff who organise MEPs' activities. In addition to helping us understand MEPs' decision-making process, this mundane object also illuminates how MEPs perform multiple roles. It strictly structures MEPs' time and activities and dictates the locations in which they practice politics; its codes are essential organisational knowledge. *Weeks* are colour-coded for committees, groups, plenary, and constituency activities and meetings are scheduled appropriately. The structuring of time in this way institutionalises these four particular priorities and ensures time and space is routinely allocated for related activities, and thus the performance of these particular roles. Each month, MEPs have the temporal opportunity to perform these (multiple) roles - if they choose to. As Wodak says, 'the multiplicity of orientations of MEPs appears to be functional for the way the EP operates' (2009:111). However these particular roles have been prioritised over other possibilities, for example no time is formally allocated for national groups or regions to meet.

⁹¹ This is perhaps more in line with Whitaker's (2011) work on MEPs which follows Fenno's (1973) position that parliamentarians can pursue multiple aims including influencing policy, being re-elected, and seeking offices (2011:3,7).

This study has also revealed how the performance of multiple roles is strategically organised at the everyday level. Assistants help to organise MEPs' time to focus on and pursue particular interests. MEPs become experts by planning their time strategically; e.g. attending the relevant bits of committees and meeting relevant interest groups. The MEP provided a grid indicating how he wanted his week structured to ensure temporal focus on his interests and office activities were directed towards the pursuit of these. MEPs move between the meetings, or CoPs, dictated each week by the calendar and 're-contextualise' their interests appropriately (Wodak:2009:143). The pursuit of their particular interests is planned strategically from the office where frontstage performances are prepared and tailored. Whilst speeches are frequently given and arguments repeatedly made, performances are tailored to the perspective of the particular audience to persuade them. MEPs change the way issues are presented to a group of visiting constituents, their NPD, group, committee, or other actors, but they may re-use powerful metaphors, stories, or examples. They also gain a feel for which types of knowledge should be prioritised in each backstage CoP.

Wodak says Abélès' documentary *A Tribu Exotique* can make individual MEPs seem delusional and mistaken about their ability to exert influence in this chaotic world (2009:74). However I found that MEPs' focus on specific issues gives coherence and purpose to their seemingly chaotic lives and brings consistency to the multiple roles they perform. People exist in a nexus of multi-memberships and 'often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves' (Wenger:1998:158) – or, change masks. However, sometimes fragments have to be reconciled, such as legislative and representative roles. Multi-membership involves on-going tensions, tension implying an effort at co-existence, and as Wenger says, this can be achieved by building bridges across the landscape of practice (1998:149-163). Focusing on particular issues can facilitate reconciliation for MEPs, giving their activities across the monthly calendar coherence and purpose. In this way MEPs can also successfully play the game and exert influence in their specialist area⁹². The performance of multiple roles by MEPs is taken-for-granted here, embedded in mundane daily routines, and negotiating them is part of the doxa, the taken-for-granted premise which makes interaction between actors meaningful (Adler-Nissen:2009:97), because it is the challenge all MEPs face in this field of action.

⁹² Realising this also helps us address Wodak's challenge that people have unrealistic expectations of politicians as people who can solve complex problems in the face of global economic processes (2002:202).

9.4.2.3 Opportunities and Constraints

Conceptualising the EP as a transnational political field with a particular habitus enables us to explore the opportunities presented to and constraints faced by MEPs. This framework creates space for agency as it enables us to explore how actors strategise from their position in the field. Individual MEPs face a number of constraints and opportunities as they pursue their aims in this field. Firstly, the habitus is consensual, egalitarian, enabling and inclusive - for MEPs who develop a feel for the game. The habitus is historically generated and as the EP has never had a permanent majority and coalitions shift constantly, MEPs cannot be too 'edgy' in their dealings with colleagues. For MEPs who want to shape EU legislation and EP politics, if they develop a feel for the game, there are many opportunities to exert influence in co-operative backstage processes, by persuading committee and group colleagues and therefore influencing voting lists. However in order to persuade colleagues, MEPs have to acquire and embody the appropriate disposition and accumulate valid capital. They must acquire appropriate attributes and resources for successful performances. Thus some MEPs are perceived to be more influential than others.

MEPs exert influence by persuading less- and non- expert colleagues to follow their position. To do this they acquire and embody the appropriate disposition as a serious, co-operative specialist. This disposition may take time to acquire through participation and experience. Successful performances are those which are publicly validated and present an image, or self, which is socially supported in the context of a status hierarchy and surrounding social system. The degree to which an individual can sustain a respectable self-image depends on possession of structural resources, as well as attributes deemed desirable by the dominant culture (Branaman:1997).

To successfully exert influence, MEPs must accumulate valid types of individual and delegated capital (structural resources) to persuade colleagues. Individual capital includes organisational, expert, and political knowledge (Wodak:2009:46) and language skills as well as the aforementioned informal reputation. Particular individuals reputed as specialists were repeatedly identified as influential within the group by interviewees because other MEPs listened to their expert advice. Meanwhile delegated capital means the acquisition of particular formal offices: rapporteur, shadow rapporteur, or committee chair, but particularly co-ordinator and group leader were frequently identified as influential offices.

Skilled co-ordinators exert influence through their pivotal role moving between the committee and group, accumulating expert and political knowledge. Group Leaders play a steering role and influence the group line due to their regular interaction with other group leaders in the Conference of Presidents and accumulation of political knowledge. These MEPs constitute the *core group* and exert influence by speaking routinely in meetings to persuade non-experts, ‘normally’ influencing the group line.

This political field’s system of positions means opportunities to exert influence are dispersed widely, for individuals who develop a feel for the game. However there are two important caveats. Firstly, not all MEPs are playing the same game and primarily aiming to shape EU legislation, notably eurosceptic EFD and NI MEPs. They have different stakes and employ different strategies to achieve their objectives (see Brack:2012). Secondly this finding must be nuanced by a distinction between legislative and political experts and expertise. Rather than a level playing field, the EP is more accurately experienced as a field with two levels; a legislative sub-field where MEPs are immersed in policy detail and a political sub-field occupied by those focused on the institutional game. There is bleed through as MEPs can occupy positions in both and because new MEPs seem to undergo an ‘apprenticeship period’ (Weatherford:1985:27, Matthews:1960) in the legislative sub-field, unless they possess enough capital to circumvent this. The groups’ committee experts accumulate expert knowledge and become legislative experts in their narrow specialist area and non-experts rely on their technical advice as described. However group leaders accumulate political expertise by regularly interacting with MEPs from other groups. They accumulate political knowledge by gaining further awareness of the game (Wodak:2009:46).

The existence of the Conference of Presidents reminds us that although the groups play a vital role in EP politics, MEPs also perform an institutional role as part of their nexus of multi-memberships, due to the EP’s position in the EU super-field (Kauppi:2011:154) and its historical relation to the other EU institutions. The collective institutional interest has been crucial in the EP’s long quest for power (Priestley:2008) and MEPs also consider this in their everyday practice of politics and decision-making process (Ripoll Servent:2011:8). The EP’s position in the EU super-field, as well as an MEP’s position in the EP field, are the context in which individual MEPs practice politics and make decisions.

9.5 Emerging Messages

This study of MEPs' everyday practice of politics has also revealed insights which speak to three other issues of scholarly concern.

9.5.1 Becoming European?

The Structural Constructivist approach taken has shown that there are many opportunities for individual MEPs to influence EU legislation and EP politics, if they develop a feel for the game. Exploring the everyday context, or space, in which MEPs practice politics ethnographically, has revealed that MEPs have a lot of freedom to develop a feel for the game and pursue their interests within this relatively autonomous transnational field, due to the distance – physical, social, and cultural - of the *Brussels Bubble* from citizens and other actors. MEPs and their staff are physically segregated within the convenient European Quarter during their time in Brussels and their ghettoisation is reinforced by encapsulating networking (also see Rozanska:2011) and elite tastes, habits and codes. Interviewees confirmed findings from other studies that MEPs often receive little interest in their voting behaviour from their national media or parties, until there is controversy or a crisis. I concur with Ringe that the PPC mechanism is the 'normal' decision-making process in the EP because it indicates who decides and how, 'most of the time' (2010:209). MEPs have the freedom to learn to play the game and to accumulate valid resources to play the game successfully. They can learn how to win within this field and therefore adapt their strategies accordingly to achieve success. As Kauppi says:

'European political integration is also social and cultural integration. Spending time in Brussels changes the political habitus of politicians ... work in Brussels does not present an alternative to national political careers, they do not all become federalists after having worked in the EU. Rather, trans-national political careers modify opportunity structures' (2003:785).

Approaching socialisation as how individuals learn to participate successfully as organisational members is a fruitful approach in addition to measuring whether MEPs' voting behaviour becomes more pro-European over time, for those seeking to understand MEP behaviour. An interesting question is posed by Abélès who ponders whether MEPs can transcend parochial issues and promote a European approach without being confined to the role of technocratic expert, out-of-touch with the concerns of constituents

(1993:15). Individual MEPs can pursue issues of interest to their constituents, either via campaigns, or if they choose to strategically focus upon these issues as has been described through a relevant committee. Alternatively, by developing a feel for the game, they can contact the appropriate actors and either attempt to persuade them of their view or raise this in the committee or group during the voting list construction process.

9.5.2 A Normal Parliament?

Some political scientists argue that we should approach the EP as a ‘normal’ parliament rather than as a *sui generis* institution (see Chapter 1). Taggart and Bale urge researchers to approach the EP comparatively and MEPs as parliamentarians *per se* (2006:5). Despite some unique features, such as its 23 working languages and multinational character, the EP shares many features with other parliaments which have been repeatedly verified by RCV analysis (see Chapter 1). Whilst the EP may share some important features with other parliaments, we should note some important differences if we aim to improve our understanding of MEPs’ behaviour inside this institution.

Firstly, Ringe’s study has shown that group cohesion in the EP, or the ‘party effect’, is based on bottom-up PPC rather than top-down discipline, sanctions, and rewards as occurs at the national level in national parties. He suggests therefore that EP politics is not as ‘normal’ as some previous research suggests (2010:212). Like Ringe I have taken the proposed normality as a starting point, rather than as a final conclusion, which needs to be refined and nuanced.

This research highlights a further way in which the EP’s proposed normalcy can be brought into question, by exploring the wider context in which the EP is situated. The EP’s historical position in the EU superfield means MEPs can use political knowledge from certain positions in the field to persuade non-expert colleagues to prioritise and perform their institutional role. Role tensions are routinely negotiated in NPD and group meetings as part of the voting list construction process. The negotiation of multiple roles is part of the doxa; it is the taken-for-granted premise or fundamental truth which makes co-operation between (political) actors meaningful in this space (Adler-Nissen:2009:97). Gaining a deeper understanding of MEP behaviour and the negotiation of multiple roles

requires a methodological approach which explores the everyday practice of politics in context.

By conceptualising the EP as a transnational political field and approaching MEP behaviour more broadly, we are reminded that MEPs operate within a historical and cultural context. The habitus is historically generated (Bourdieu:1990:60, Maton:2008:51) and the EP's consensual habitus has developed in relation to the EP's position in the EU superfield which affects resources and motivations in both of the EP's sub-fields. In the legislative subfield, rapporteurs and co-ordinators defend their political visions but also enter into a logic of co-operation with other groups because otherwise they may lose collectively. In the political sub-field, the centre of the House is forced to co-operate and make broad compromises because otherwise they have no influence with the Commission and Council (see Chapter 8). Taking the wider historical and institutional context into account and a broader approach to MEP behaviour, nuances our findings about MEP behaviour and the role of the political groups, as we consider MEPs' institutional role and the role the groups play in the wider context.

Whilst the groups are important and play a vital role in the EP's political game and MEPs everyday practice of politics, firstly, there are important differences in the way these structures operate compared with top-down national parties. Secondly, MEPs and groups must also negotiate MEPs' institutional role. Whilst the EP may share important features with other parliaments, this normalcy should be a starting point rather than a final conclusion for those seeking to understand actors' behaviour inside this plural legislature.

9.5.3 A Normal Workplace?

Finally, if, as academics we aim to contribute to debates of public interest, then an alternative take on how 'normal' the EP is could prove powerful. Rather than, or in addition to, assessing how 'normal' a parliament the EP is, ethnography illuminates how normal a workplace the EP is. By going backstage and exploring MEPs' activities and routines, we discover the opportunities and constraints they face at the everyday level and the daily strategies they employ to pursue their aims and interests, as people working inside an organisation or workplace. The work environment and coping strategies described bare much resemblance to the work places experienced and coping strategies employed by

people across Europe (see Wodak:1996). Always feeling short of time, receiving too many emails, and working with jargon and technical information relevant to your profession or sector, and then organising your time to focus on key activities to ensure you achieve your targets, knowing where to seek further relevant information, relying on colleagues and working as a team, and perhaps employing, or being employed as, an assistant of some kind - will feel familiar to people in many professional fields. As Eriksen says; 'anthropology is about how different people can be, but it also tries to find out in what sense it can be said that all humans have something in common' (2011:1).

The latent order behind the apparent chaos in the EP which has been described reveals common features with other social and professional fields (Wodak:2009:25, 1996:170). Wodak's research on communication barriers in institutions shows gulfs and misunderstanding between professionals and outsiders due to technical jargon and structures (1996:1-3). Professional discourses exclude outsiders and serve certain functions of power, justification, and legitimation (1996:170). Describing similar findings, Luyendijk (2011) suggests ethnography with elites is increasingly necessary where their activities impact upon citizens. He conducted ethnography among bankers because 'what happens in the City of London affects everyone, but most of us know very little about the people who work there – or what they do all day' (2011). He argues generalisations about 'bankers' obscure many activities and roles existing in the sector. Bankers have much in common with other professionals; one compared himself with a GP, 'you spend many hours memorising terms (body parts, diseases, treatments) and learning to recognise patterns. Then you put in very long hours and collect a nice salary, while employing your jargon to intimidate outsiders' (2011). Latour and Woolgar's (1986) work is also a helpful reference. They conducted participant observation in science laboratories to explore activities involved in the production and circulation of knowledge, and the social construction of 'facts'. Few 'facts' emerge and scientists strive amid a wealth of chaotic events and can find themselves immersed in a storm of political passions (1986:252). Ethnography can demystify science to help us understand it as a social process and build a bridge between scientists and society:

'if the public could be helped to understand how scientific knowledge is generated and could understand that it is comprehensible and no more extraordinary than any other field of endeavour, they would not expect more of scientists than they are capable of delivering, nor would they fear scientists as much as they do' (Salk in Latour&Woolgar:1986:13).

Likewise, ethnography can paint a more realistic picture of politics as a profession than is routinely presented in the media (see Wodak:2009). This study has aimed to enhance our understanding of this profession. By exploring MEPs' activities, perspective, and the opportunities and constraints they face, it could potentially help people to understand better what MEPs do and where decisions are made. Spending a sustained period of time with this transnational group, seeking to understand their perspective, and identifying order in the apparent chaos, has shown that rather than a strange, incomprehensible elite in a distant and unfamiliar world, the EP has much in common with any normal workplace. It is an organisation like many, full of individuals coming to terms with and strategically negotiating their work environment, to pursue their particular aims (Rosen:1991:12). In this way, ethnography makes the strange familiar (O'Reilly:2009:158).

9.6 Contribution and Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis has explored how individual MEPs practice European politics at the everyday level inside the EP. Through ethnography, it has got closer to MEPs as dynamic actors doing European politics and their perspective. It has particularly explored the role of the group and NPD structures in MEPs' everyday practice of politics. By exploring MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics, the thesis has shed light on how individual MEPs decide how to vote, perform multiple roles, and the opportunities and constraints they face. The intertwining of the empirical data, iterative theoretical framework, and research issues has produced a dense bricolage which presents a deeper, more nuanced, and more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour than was previously available in the European Studies literature. This is the added value of the inter-disciplinary approach taken here which has combined tools from Political Science and Anthropology to produce something neither discipline could alone.

The primary target audience of this work is European Studies scholars interested in the EP and MEP behaviour and this thesis has made a number of contributions to the literature. Firstly, it takes a broader approach to MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics. The thesis provides a deeper, more nuanced and more holistic understanding of MEP behaviour by approaching politics as a social practice and MEPs as active, dynamic agents conducting this activity within particular social spaces. The research reveals backstage pre-plenary processes during which MEPs decide how to vote by further exploring the

relationships between MEPs, committees, NPDs, and groups inside this institution. Secondly this thesis has gone a step further and explored how and why the groups play an important role in the political game inside the EP. It tells us more about the groups, their role in MEPs' everyday practice of politics, actors' dynamic interactions with these structures, and the local meanings generated around them. Consequently, the thesis has revealed a deeper understanding of how cohesion is achieved here. Thirdly, the research gets closer to MEPs as actors doing politics and making Europe in order to begin to try to de-mystify this profession and transnational political processes. It's more holistic approach paints a more humanising picture of this profession and the EP as a normal workplace.

Through its agent-focused approach, this research also responds to the second research rationale. As Ostrander complains, the social sciences still rarely study-up and our lack of knowledge about elites helps them maintain their privileged social position (1995:133). For the EP, lack of knowledge about what MEPs do in Brussels is contributing to the democratic deficit. Whilst decades of treaty reform might have addressed the institutional deficit, it has not addressed the socio-psychological or participation deficit (Chrysoschoou:2007:364). This is perhaps linked to the perceived distance and disconnect between EP elites and citizens. This research has also aimed to open up this political field and has explored how decisions are made and politics is practiced at the everyday level – in order to enhance our understanding of where decisions are made, by who, and how – so that it might be easier to understand this profession and also who is accountable for decisions. Dissemination could perhaps help citizens to understand what MEPs do, the limitations they face, and what the act of representation consists of in Brussels.

The project's focus on agency has expanded how we understand the political in this context and has produced new insights. It has simultaneously raised new questions. Perhaps the most immediate is how the routine exchange of knowledge described varies across the EP groups in meaningful ways. Subtle variations were described and should be investigated further comparatively. Differences between the groups and their decision-making processes can only become more important as parties gain prominence in EU politics and processes; for example if they put forward candidates for the next Commission President.

This thesis opens up further research avenues in two particular directions. Firstly, it reveals further questions about European integration processes which could be fruitfully explored with ethnography. Specifically, it raises further questions about: (1) the role different categories of staff play in EP politics; (2) the strategies eurosceptic MEPs employ and their effectiveness; (3) whether and how MEPs' strategies have changed over time with the EP's empowerment; (4) what MEPs do in their constituencies in green constituency *weeks* and how this affects their practice of politics in Brussels (see Fenno:1978); (5) what MEPs' interactions with their national parties consist of; and (6) it also questions the notion of expertise, how this is brought into EU processes and how expertise is performed (see Rasmussen:2013, Field:2013, Marshall:2010).

This project also indicates a second research avenue, which is the use of its approach to analyse other political organisations. Using ethnography to explore elite political contexts is a way to open up elite spaces to explore how the everyday is performed there, crucial in societies where citizens are increasingly disengaged from politics. The inter-disciplinary theoretical framework may be able to enliven stagnant or stalling debates and shed new light on dynamics occurring in other political contexts.

This thesis identifies with the Anthropology of the EU and research which is seeking to get closer to the actors making Europe in Brussels. Like these literatures, it sees European integration as a social process, and therefore has explored MEP behaviour as the everyday practice of politics to produce a deeper, more nuanced, and more holistic understanding of this phenomenon than was available. This is its primary contribution to the European Studies literature. This was made possible by heeding Malinowski's advice that, 'the most important thing for the student ... is never to forget the living, palpitating flesh and blood organism of man which remains somewhere in the heart of every institution (1934 in Mitchell:2010:3).

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Turnout in EP elections (1979-2009)

Year	Turnout (%)
1979-EU9	61.99
1984-EU10	58.98
1989-EU12	58.41
1994-EU12	56.67
1999-EU15	49.51
2004-EU25	45.47
2009-EU27	43.00

(Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/000cdcd9d4/Turnout-%281979-2009%29.html>, last accessed 11/3/2013)

Appendix 2:

Number of MEPs – 7th parliamentary term

	EPP	S&D	ALDE	GREEN/ EFA	ECR	GUE	EFD	NI	Total
BE	5	5	5	4	1		1	1	22
BG	7	4	5				1	1	18
CZ	2	7			9	4			22
DK	1	5	3	1	1	1	1		13
DE	42	23	12	14		8			99
EE	1	1	3	1					6
IE	4	3	4			1			12
GR	7	8	1	1		3	2		22
ES	25	23	2	2		1		1	54
FR	30	13	6	16		5	1	3	74
HR	5	5			1	1			12
IT	33	22	5		2		8	3	73
CY	2	2				2			6
LV	4	1	1	1	1	1			9
LT	4	3	2		1		2		12
LU	3	1	1	1					6
HU	14	4			1			3	22
MT	2	4							6
NL	5	3	6	3	1	2	1	5	26
AT	6	5	1	2				5	19
PL	29	7			11		4		51
PT	10	7		1		4			22
RO	14	11	4					3	32
SI	4	2	2						8
SK	6	5	1				1		13

	EPP	S&D	ALDE	GREEN/ EFA	ECR	GUE	EFD	NI	Total
FI	4	2	4	2			1		13
SE	5	6	4	4		1			20
UK		13	12	5	27	1	10	5	73
Total	EPP 274	S&D 195	ALDE 84	GREEN 58	ECR 56	GUE 35	EFT 33	NI 30	Total 765*

* Plus the EP President

(Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/crosstable.html>, last accessed 4/7/2013)

Appendix 2b:

The EP's Committees

Standing Committees and Sub committees

AFET	Foreign Affairs
<i>DROI</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>
<i>SEDE</i>	<i>Security and Defence</i>
DEVE	Development
INTA	International Trade
BUDG	Budgets
CONT	Budgetary Control
ECON	Economic and Monetary Affairs
EMPL	Employment and Social Affairs
ENVI	Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
ITRE	Industry, Research and Energy
IMCO	Internal Market and Consumer Protection
TRAN	Transport and Tourism
REGI	Regional Development
AGRI	Agriculture and Rural Development
PECH	Fisheries
CULT	Culture and Education
JURI	Legal Affairs
LIBE	Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
AFCO	Constitutional Affairs
FEMM	Women's Rights and Gender Equality
PETI	Petitions

(Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/parliamentary-committees.html;jsessionid=D6F6C3DFD28A6F9212AABD1AB19CFB0D.node2>, last accessed 9/11/13).

Appendix 3:

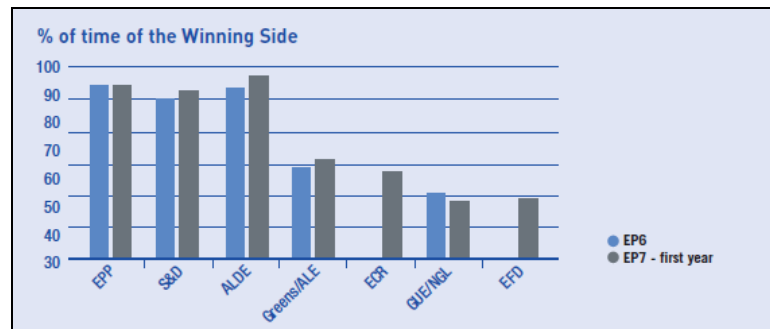
Major check points in the EP's history

1970 & 1975	Budget Treaties	Greater budgetary powers
1979	First direct elections by universal suffrage	Increased legitimacy and a democratic mandate
1980	ECJ <i>Isoglucose</i> ruling	Gave <i>de facto</i> delaying power and reinforced the right of consultation
1987	Single European Act	Introduced co-operation and assent

		procedures
1993	Maastricht Treaty	Introduced co-decision and approval power of the Commission
1999	Amsterdam Treaty	Extended co-decision and the right to veto Commission President nominees
2003	Nice Treaty	Further extended co-decision
2009	Lisbon Treaty	Co-decision extended into new fields, equal say on the budget, assent in international agreements

(Source: adapted from Corbett et al:2011,2003:354, Scully:2007:177, Hix et al :2007, and Europa)

Appendix 4: VoteWatch 2010 Annual Report findings



Voting coalitions in the 2004-2009 European Parliament							Voting coalitions in the 2009-2014 European Parliament (1st year)						
All roll-call votes (6,149 votes)							All roll call votes July 2009 – June 2010 (792 votes)						
	GUE/NGL	G/EFA	SOC	ALDE	EPP	UEN		GUE/NGL	G/EFA	S&D	ALDE	EPP	ECR
GUE/NGL							GUE/NGL						
G/EFA	74%						G/EFA	75%					
SOC	62%	70%					S&D	60%	73%				
ALDE	52%	62%	75%				ALDE	52%	67%	79%			
EPP-ED	41%	50%	70%	77%			EPP	37%	48%	69%	76%		
UEN	45%	49%	63%	71%	81%		ECR	38%	39%	47%	59%	64%	
IND/DEM	41%	39%	40%	45%	51%	54%	EFD	34%	35%	42%	48%	55%	55%

(Source:VoteWatch:2010)

Appendix 5:
Flyers for Events in Brussels

justanight
WWW.JUSTANIGHT.NET

FASHION SHOW
 BY VANESSA PINTO
 For the ladies – free
 Cointreapolitan drinks
 and possibility
 to win lingerie from
 Chantal Thomass

COINTREAU

Chantal Thomass
PARIS

Just a Night & Eurocrats present
EUROCRATS' PARTY
 FASHION EDITION

The best expat party in Brussels - at the legendary Hotel Barsey's

Doors open **22:30**
 Music by **JONATHAN LOYS**
 Dress Code: Be classy, be fashionable

SATURDAY 02.10.10

Barsey's Avenue Louise 381-383, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF TOINE MANDERS MEP

FROM BRUSSELS WITH LOVE
 FIRST AND OFFICIAL EP ASSISTANTS EVENT

16 DECEMBER 2010 | 22:30PM - 05:00AM
 SPIRITO MARTINI (RUE DE STASSART 18)

YOUR DJ'S:

LORDIGO OTTATI - ANARCHIC
 MUSICSPACE.COM/LORDIGOOTTATI

SOUNDBITES - NL
 VELDOR/SOUNDBITES @ FACEBOOK

MIX EP - BE
 ASSISTANT TO TOINE MANDERS

PRESALE (STARTS 3000) € 5,- / €7,- AT THE DOOR
 FOR INFO SEND E-MAIL TO KIM.BOGTE@EUROPARL.EUROPA.EU

LIBERALS & DEMOCRATS

Finally, holidays are over and we are all back in the city we love

justanight
WWW.JUSTANIGHT.NET

I ♥ BXL

Just a Night & Eurocrats present
EUROCRATS' PARTY
 SEASON PREMIERE

The best expat party in Brussels - at the legendary Hotel Barsey's

Doors open **22:30**
 Music by **JONATHAN LOYS**
 Dress Code: Be classy, be fashion

SATURDAY 04.09.10

Barsey's Avenue Louise 381-383, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

EUROCRATS' PARTY
 Season Premiere

With an international crowd mixed with
 the best of Belgium, amazing ambiance
 and a luxurious venue, one thing's for sure
 – you'll experience a fabulous night out!

SATURDAY 4 September 2010

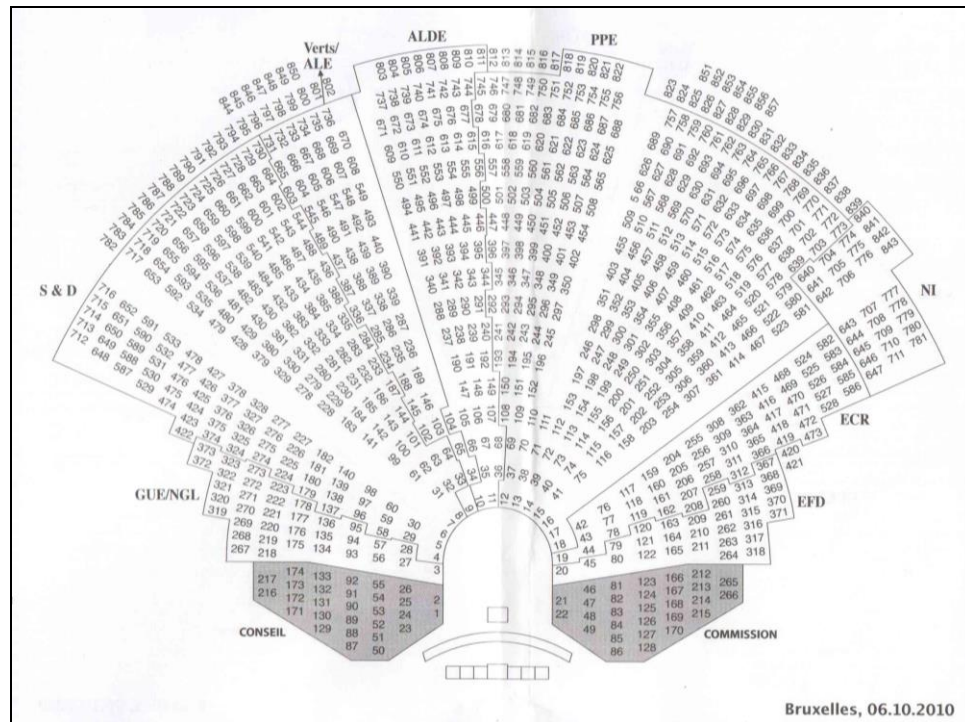
The Warwick Barsey Hotel
 381-383 Avenue Louise, 1050 Brussels

Doors Open 22:30
 Dress Code: Be classy, be fashion
 Bring your Business card

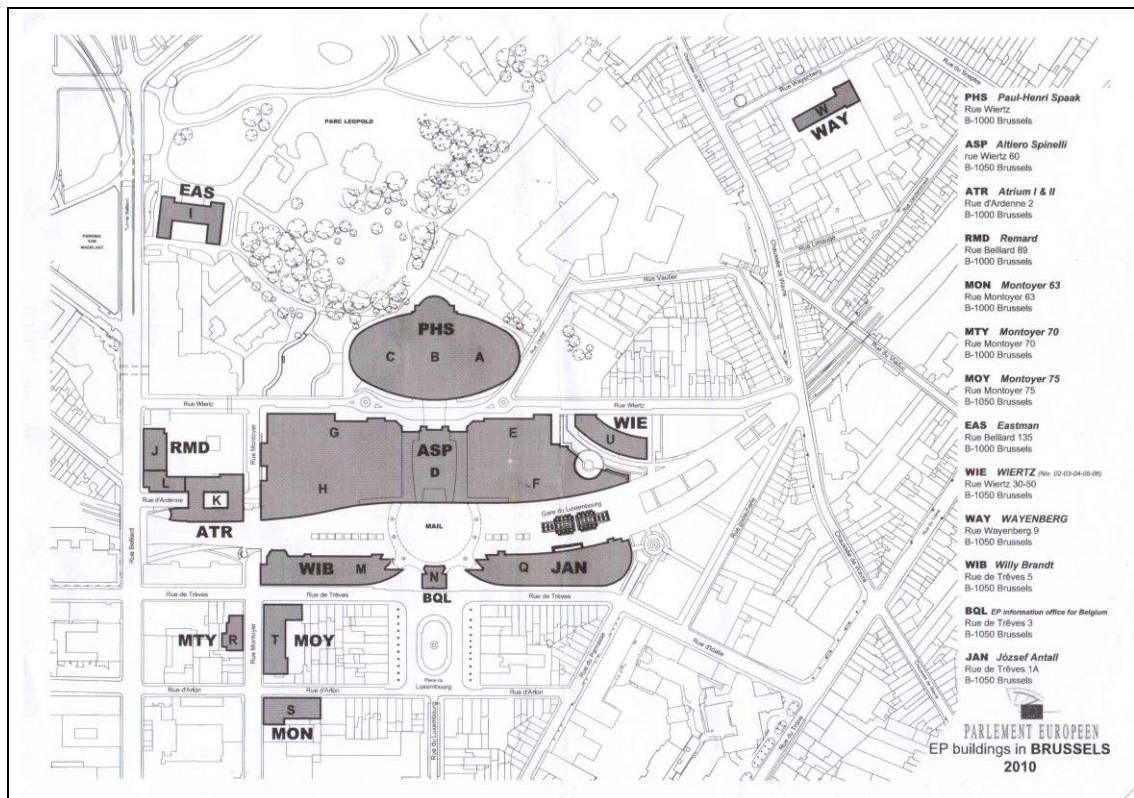
www.justanight.net or the Eurocrats group on Facebook
 for more info, party pics and invitations to future events.

LIBERALS & DEMOCRATS

Appendix 6: Seating Plan of the EP Chamber



Appendix 7: Map of the EP Complex in Brussels



Appendix 8:
The EP Calendar (2010)



	01						02						03				
	53	1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8			9	10	11	12	13
①		4	11	18	25		1	8	15	22			1	8	15	22	29
②		5	12	19	26		2	9	16	23			2	9	16	23	30
③		6	13	20	27		3	10	17	24			3	10	17	24	31
④		7	14	21	28		4	11	18	25			4	11	18	25	
⑤	1	8	15	22	29		5	12	19	26			5	12	19	26	
⑥	2	9	16	23	30		6	13	20	27			6	13	20	27	
⑦	3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28			7	14	21	28	
	04						05						06				
	13	14	15	16	17		17	18	19	20	21	22	22	23	24	25	26
①		5	12	19	26			3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28
②		6	13	20	27			4	11	18	25		①	8	15	22	29
③		7	14	21	28			5	12	19	26		2	9	16	23	30
④	1	8	15	22	29			6	13	20	27		3	10	17	24	
⑤	2	9	16	23	30			7	14	21	28		4	11	18	25	
⑥	3	10	17	24			1	8	15	22	29		5	12	19	26	
⑦	4	11	18	25			2	9	16	23	30		6	13	20	27	
	07						08						09				
	26	27	28	29	30		30	31	32	33	34	35	35	36	37	38	39
①		5	12	19	26			2	9	16	23	30		6	13	20	27
②		6	13	20	27			3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28
③		7	14	21	28			4	11	18	25		1	8	15	22	29
④	1	8	15	22	29			5	12	19	26		2	9	16	23	30
⑤	2	9	16	23	30			6	13	20	27		3	10	17	24	
⑥	3	10	17	24	31			7	14	21	28		4	11	18	25	
⑦	4	11	18	25			1	8	15	22	29		5	12	19	26	
	10						11						12				
	39	40	41	42	43		44	45	46	47	48		48	49	50	51	52
①		4	11	18	25		1	8	15	22	29			6	13	20	27
②		5	12	19	26		2	9	16	23	30			7	14	21	28
③		6	13	20	27		3	10	17	24			1	8	15	22	29
④		7	14	21	28		4	11	18	25			2	9	16	23	30
⑤	1	8	15	22	29		5	12	19	26			3	10	17	24	31
⑥	2	9	16	23	30		6	13	20	27			4	11	18	25	
⑦	3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28			5	12	19	26	

- ⑦ Hedges / Domingo / Neděle / Sondag / Sonntag / pühapäev / Kapustj / Sunday / Dimanche / Doménach / Domenica / svätidien / sokmadents / Vaumap / Il-Madd / Zondag / Niedziela / Domingo / duminică / nedēļa / nedelja / Sannuntai / söndag
- Сессия / Session / Zasedání / Session / Tagung / Istungjörk / Tíðroðar / Session / Session / Seßion / Sessjón / Sessja / Sesiya / Üls / Sessjoni / Zitting / Posiedzenie / Sessão / Sessune / Zasednutie / Zasedanje / Isturto / Sammanträdesperiod
- Комиссия / Comisiones / Výbory / Udsalg / Ausschuß / Komitee / Entpöriz / Committee / Commissions / Comiti / Commissions / Komitetas / Komisijos / Bizotbúgok / Kumitati / Commisões / Komisje / Comissões / Comiti / Výbory / Odbori / Vallokkunnat / Utiskott
- Группа / Grupos / Skupiny / Gruppen / Fraktionen / Fraktsionid / Oudóez / Groups / Grupos / Grúpa / Gruppi / Politiskás grupas / Grúps / Kópvalhöfðsþing / Gruppi / Fracties / Grupy / Grupos / Grupuri / Skupiny / Skupine / Ryhmät / Grupper
- Внешние парламентские деятельности / Actividades parlamentarias externas / Vnější činnosti Parlamentu / Ekstern parlamentarisk verksamhet / Externe parlamentarische Aktivitäten / Parlamentärlíne togvör / Εξωτερικές κοινοβουλευτικές δραστηριότητες / External parliamentary activities / Activitäts parlamentares extérieures / Gníomhaíochtaí parlaimintíocha seachtracha / Aktivität parlamentarier externe / Parlamento ārējie pasākumi / Ilorine Parlamento volde / Kildu parlamenti írvíkingsþáttak / Aktivitātes Parlamentari Externi / Externe parlamentarische Aktivitäten / Zewnętrzne działania parlamentarne / Actividades parlamentares externas / Activități parlamentare externe / Vorkajlie parlamentné činnosti / Zunanje parlamentarne dejavnosti / Toiminta parlamentin ulkopuolella / Externi parlamentariskt arbete
- Посредственик комитет / Comité de Conciliación / Smidti vjbor / Forligsudvalget / Vermittlungsausschuss / Lepituskomitee / Entpöriz söndaklögur / Conciliation Committee / Comité de Conciliation / Coite Idr-réitigh / Comitato di conciliazione / Samierinskávan komiteja / Iskirins komitetas / Egyeztető Bizotbúg / Kumitat ta' Konciliazzjoni / bemiddelingscomité / Komisja Pojednowcza / Comité de conciliação / Comité de conciliere / Zmierovací výbor / Posredovalni odbor / Sovittelukomitea / Förlitningskommitté

Appendix 9:

Morning Post in the Office

July Post

1. A magazine on how the EP has banned seal imports from Canada
2. A dinner invite from an inter-group on with a discussion on the single market in the C21st and how to make it greener and more efficient
3. A CV from a graduate asking for an internship
4. A reply from a group colleague to a request for information
5. A regular circular from a Commission DG
6. A pro-fur leaflet
7. An information sheet on exiled Iranians who protested about human rights and an invite to a rally
8. A survey from ComRes
9. An advert to sign a Written Declaration on stopping the building of a nuclear power station affecting another EU member-state
10. A pamphlet on stopping smacking children and a sticker to wear for the awareness day
11. Bulletin magazine from the former MEPs association
12. Invites to EP events on: Turkish accession, how football can change lives, drugs and international terrorism, women in business and human rights, climate change, how copper is important to everyone
13. A report from an NGO on poverty in selected countries
14. A local farmers magazine

September Post

1. New Europe paper
2. European Voice
3. Euroview magazine - the magazine of European business in Taiwan
4. EU baroque orchestra newsletter
5. Eurogroup for Animals newsletter
6. Letter from a computer science research institute about their activities
7. Response from a Commissioner about a constituency letter sent to them.
8. 2nd Response from a Commissioner about a constituency letter sent to them.
9. Letter from a Commissioner
10. 3 standard letters from constituents (via an interest group) on the banning of battery cages for hens
11. Standard letter from an interest group asking us to write to the Commission on their behalf.
12. Moroccan High Commission for planning - a magazine on human development in an emerging country
13. University of Munich, economic research institute letter
14. Magazine - independent review on European security and defence
15. Newsletter from Malabo (Equatorial Guinea)
16. National Democratic Institute - 25 years newsletter
17. Most - quarterly bulletin of the Slovenian business and research association
18. Food Today - European food information council newsletter
19. ERA (Europäische rechtsakademie, Academy of European Law) - invite and registration form for annual conference on European food law 2010
20. Advert from an MEP – asking to sign written declaration on reducing trans fatty acids in food to 2%
21. Human Rights Watch magazine - India focus
22. Response from a Commissioner about a constituency letter sent to them
23. Leaflet - from Advisory committee on fisheries and aquaculture - a body for dialogue with the fishing industry

24. Invites: concert to celebrate 50 years of Cyprus's independence, "Energy Efficiency - smart metering / smart grids", Bavarian representation dinner roundtable, London Olympics committee event invite.

Appendix 10:

Number of emails received by the office (3 Wednesdays in June 2010)

	<u>Plenary week</u>	<u>Group week</u>	<u>Committee week</u>	<u>Average</u>
TOTAL	262	181	138	193.7
Event invitations	34	52	32	39.3
Interest groups (lobbies, NGOs, research groups - policy briefings, press releases, newsletters and requests)	26	33	18	25.7
Written Declarations	44	2	0	15.3
Political Group	23	11	10	14.7
Committee/delegation related	12	11	21	14.7
National party delegation	21	10	12	14.3
Policy Interests	19	10	7	12.0
EP internal - press and notices, quaestors, library	19	7	9	11.7
Internal Brussels office (including travel arrangements)	15	11	6	10.7
Junk emails	10	8	7	8.3
Inter-groups	9	7	1	5.7
Standard issues emails (from individuals via interest groups)	6	3	6	5.0
Constituency issues and visits	7	3	3	4.3
National party	6	2	3	3.7
National EP office and permanent representation	2	6	2	3.3
Housing adverts	3	3	0	2.0
Letters signing requests	3	2	0	1.7
National media	2	1	0	1.0
Council & Commission	1	1	1	1.0
Europarty	1	0	0	0.3
Other political groups	1	0	0	0.3

Appendix 11:

Extracts from the MEP's office diary (March/April and November 2010)

[INSERT APPENDIX HERE]

Appendix A: Research Timetable

[INSERT TABLE HERE]

Appendix B: Interviews

List of Interviewees

	Date	Interviewee	Length
1	7\3\09	MEP, UK	33m
2	9\3\09	Assistant, UK	47m
3	17\6\10	Assistant, UK	43m
4	26\6\10	Stagiaire	57m
5	2\7\10	Intern, lobbying firm	41m
6	20\7\10	EP Official	47m
7	29\7\10	Assistant, UK	55m
8	2\8\10	Assistant	60m
9	14\10\10	Assistant, UK	31m
10	18\10\10	EP Official, General Secretariat	54m
11	28\10\10	EP Official, General Secretariat	23m
12	28\10\10	EP Official, committee secretariat	59m
13	5\11\10	EP Official, General Secretariat	43m
14	8\11\10	Group secretariat official	1h 30m
15	12\11\10	EP Official	1h 11m
16	12\11\10	EP Official, General Secretariat	1h 26m
17	15\11\10	EP Official, committee secretariat	30m
18	17\11\10	MEP, UK	40m
19	17\11\10	EP Official	55m
20	20\11\10	EP Official	26m
21	21\11\10	EP Official, delegation secretariat	38m
22	23\11\10	Assistant, UK	1h 2m
23	24\11\10	EP Official	1h
24	25\11\10	EP Official	1h 7m
25	25\11\10	Assistant	57m
26	26\11\10	EP official	29m
27	30\11\10	MEP, Ireland	29m
28	2\12\10	MEP, UK	29m
29	6\12\10	MEP	18m
30	6\12\10	Assistant	54m
31	7\12\10	MEP, Germany	16m
32	8\12\10	MEP, Germany	46m
33	8\12\10	Group official, policy advisor	52m
34	9\12\10	Group official	29m
35	9\12\10	Former EP official	1h 1m
36	10\12\10	Stagiaire	41m
37	14\12\10	MEP, Estonia	11m

38	14\12\10	Assistant	30m
39	14\12\10	MEP, Finland	28m
40	15\12\10	MEP, Romania	23m
41	15\12\10	MEP, UK	26m
42	15\12\10	MEP, Denmark	32m
43	16\12\10	MEP, Slovenia	21m
44	16\12\10	MEP, France	25m
45	2\12\11	MEP, UK	39m
46	18\6\12	Assistant	30m
47	19\6\12	Group official	46m
48	19\6\12	MEP, UK	1h 2m
49	20\6\12	Group official	43m
50	20\6\12	Group official	57m
51	20\6\12	EP official, committee secretariat	43m
52	11\7\12	MEP	22m
53	11\7\12	Group official	1h
54	11\7\12	NI MEP	20m
55	11\7\12	NI assistant	12m
56	11\7\12	NI assistant, Spain	25m
57	12\7\12	Senior Group official	1h 6m
58	12\7\12	Group official	34m

Appendix C: Assistants' Survey

Questionnaire:

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ASSISTANTS' SURVEY	
Section 1: About you [optional*]	
Name:	Age:
Nationality:	Gender:
MEP's name:	Group:
Job title: assistant/secretary/stagiaire	Time worked in parliament:
Section 2: Getting here	
Why did you apply for a job in the EP?	
What previous experience/qualifications did you have?	
What training did you receive?	
Section 3: Your role	
What tasks does your job involve?	
Where do you get information and advice to do your job?	
Which people and organisations (internal and external) do you work with the most?	

* Providing these details is optional, except for your name if you wish to be entered into the prize draw.

Section 4: Inside the EP
Who has the most influence over legislation in the EP?
Section 5: The MEPs
What do you think makes a good MEP?
What factors help decide how your MEP votes?
Section 6: The political groups
How is the group voting line decided?
Who are the most important actors in your group?
Section 7: Evaluation
If you could, what would you change about the EP?
What are the most important things you feel you've learnt working here?
Has working here changed your view of the EP or the EU?
Any Other Business:
Do you have any other thoughts about the internal working of the EP?
One last question...
Would you like to take part further in the research by giving a short interview?
<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No

Responses to the Assistants Survey:

Total respondents: 48

Section 1: About you:

1. Age		%	2. Nationality		%	3. Gender		%	4. Group		%
Blank	2	4.2	Blank	4	8.3	Blank	0	0	Blank	1	2.1
21	2	4.2	French	5	10.4	Male	24	50	EPP	9	18.8
22	1	2.1	Italian	4	8.3	Female	24	50	S&D	10	20.8
23	5	10.4	Swedish	4	8.3				ALDE	14	29.2
24	4	8.3	Irish	3	6.3				Green/ EFA	8	16.7
25	8	16.7	German	3	6.3				ECR	4	8.3
26	7	14.6	Maltese	3	6.3				GUE	0	0.0
27	2	4.2	British	3	6.3				EFD	1	2.1
28	4	8.3	Belgian	2	4.2				NI	1	2.1
29	1	2.1	Finnish	2	4.2						
30	2	4.2	Dutch	2	4.2						
31	1	2.1	Austrian	2	4.2						
32	2	4.2	Polish	2	4.2						

33	1	2.1	Bulgarian	2	4.2						
36	2	4.2	Romanian	1	2.1						
40	1	2.1	American	1	2.1						
41	1	2.1	Russian	1	2.1						
45	1	2.1	Danish	1	2.1						
53	1	2.1	Estonian	1	2.1						
Average	28		Ukrainian	1	2.1						
Mode	25		Spanish	1	2.1						
			Same as MEP	33	68.8						
			Different from MEP	10	20.8						
			Blank	5	10.4						

5. Job title		%	6. Time worked in the EP							
Assistant	29	60.4			%				%	
Stagiaire	15	31.3	Blank	1	2.1					
Assistant/Policy Advisor	2	4.2	<i>Months:</i>			<i>Years:</i>				
Deputy Assistant	1	2.1	1	6	12.5	1	5	10.4		
Blank	1	2.1	2	2	4.2	1.5	7	14.6		
			3	7	14.6	2	1	2.1		
			4	3	6.3	2.5	2	4.2		
			5	1	2.1	3	4	8.3		
			6	1	2.1	3.5	1	2.1		
			9	1	2.1	4	2	4.2		
						8	2	4.2		
						16	1	2.1		
						23	1	2.1		

Section 2: Getting here:

7. Why did you apply for a job in the EP?		%	9. What training did you receive?		%
Link to BA/MA	13	27.1	Blank	3	6.3
Experience in an international arena/institution	10	20.8	None	15	31.3
Interest in European integration and politics	10	20.8	Education (degree/MA level)	11	22.9
Offered the position	7	14.6	On the job	9	18.8
To work for the EU	6	12.5	By MEP's staff	5	10.4
Like Brussels	4	8.3	EP training unit	3	6.3
To work for the national party	3	6.3	Language course	2	4.2
MEPs policy area	3	6.3	Group training	2	4.2
The work environment	3	6.3	EP stage	2	4.2
To inform people about Europe	2	4.2	Group stage	1	2.1
Previous stage	2	4.2	Stage in member-state	1	2.1
Part of degree	1	2.1			
the MEP	1	2.1			

To represent my country	1	2.1			
8. What previous experience/qualifications did you have?					
		%			%
None	2	4.2	Worked for national party	5	10.4
BA/BSc	9	18.8	National ministry	5	10.4
MA/Msc	12	25.0	Brussels internships	5	10.4
LLM	4	8.3	Consultancy	4	8.3
PhD	2	4.2	Active in national party	3	6.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>56.3</i>	Campaigning	3	6.3
			Lawyer	3	6.3
			Embassy	2	4.2
			Journalism	2	4.2
			Event management	2	4.2
			EP stage	2	4.2
			NGO	2	4.2
			Academia	2	4.2
			Lobbyist	1	2.1
			Armed forces	1	2.1
			Marketing and comms	1	2.1
			Banking	1	2.1
			Regional government	1	2.1
			Stage in the EU	1	2.1

Section 3: Your role:

10. What tasks does your job involve?									
	<1month	<3month	<6month	<1yr	<2yr	<3yr	>3yr	Total	%
OFFICE TASKS	6	8	4	3	7	4	7	39	81.3
Office tasks	4	5	3	1	4			17	35.4
Diary		3	2	1	2	3	4	15	31.3
Office management				1	2	2	3	8	16.7
Check emails	1	1	1			2	1	6	12.5
Book travel	2	1					1	4	8.3
Train new staff					1		1	2	4.2
Expenses		1					1	2	4.2
Translation		1						1	2.1
Phone calls							1	1	2.1
LEGISLATIVE TASKS	2	2	5	3	7	6	7	32	66.7
Follow committees	2		4	1	2	4	4	17	35.4
Draft amendments	1	1	1		4	1	5	13	27.1
Give policy advice				1	5	1	1	8	16.7
Write Reports			1		1	2	2	6	12.5
Make voting lists	1		1		2		2	6	12.5

Policy work		1		1		2	1	5	10.4
Draft resolutions							1	1	2.1
Negotiate for MEP					1			1	2.1
RESEARCH TASKS	3	5	2	3	6	2	6	27	56.3
Write briefings	1		2	2	4	1	5	15	31.3
Write articles		2		1		1	3	7	14.6
Research projects	2	3		1	1			7	14.6
Write speeches				1	2	1	3	7	14.6
Research case law	1							1	2.1
MEDIA TASKS	1	2	2	2	3	1	6	17	35.4
Write press releases	1		2		3		2	8	16.7
Media work				1	1		4	6	12.5
PR tasks		1		1		1		3	6.3
Blog	1				1			2	4.2
Media review		1						1	2.1
Organise press conferences							1	1	2.1
CONSTITUENT RELATIONS	1	4	1	1	4	1	5	17	35.4
Correspond with citizens		2			2		4	8	16.7
Visitors groups	1	2	1		2			6	12.5
Relations with constituency office		2		1	2			5	10.4
Work on MEPs website						1	2	3	6.3
MEETINGS	2	3	1	1	4	2	3	16	33.3
Attend meetings my MEP cannot		3		1	1		3	8	16.7
Meet lobbyists & NGOs	1				3	2		6	12.5
Meet other EU institutions					1	2		3	6.3
Networking					1			1	2.1
Meet with national government	1							1	2.1
Attend events			1					1	2.1
POLITICAL TASKS	1		1	3	5		2	12	25.0
Give political/strategic advice			1	2	4		1	8	16.7
Meet with group and NPD	1			1	3			5	10.4
Relations with national party							1	1	2.1
QUESTIONS	1	1			1		3	6	12.5
Written Questions to Commission	1	1					3	5	10.4
Written Questions to Council	1	1					2	4	8.3
Drafted oral questions					1		1	2	4.2

ORGANISE EVENTS	1	1	1		1			4	8.3
Organise seminars	1	1	1		1			4	8.3
TOTAL	6	9	5	6	8	6	7		

11. Where do you get information and advice to do your job?									
	<1month	<3month	<6month	<1yr	<2yr	<3yr	>3yr	Total	%
Other assistants	1	5	3	3	5	3	5	25	52.1
Internet	3	2	1	3	2	1	1	13	27.1
MEP office	3	4	4	0	2	0	0	13	27.1
My MEP	2	3	2	0	1	0	0	8	16.7
EP Library	3	0	1	1	0	1	1	7	14.6
Group Policy Advisors	1	0	0	1	4	0	1	7	14.6
EP secretariat/administrators	0	0	0	1	2	1	3	7	14.6
EP intranet	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6	12.5
Lobbies	1	0	0	0	2	1	2	6	12.5
NPD colleagues	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	4	8.3
NGOs	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	4	8.3
Experience	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	6.3
Group colleagues	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	6.3
Media	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	6.3
Group Secretariat	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	6.3
Permanent Representations	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	6.3
Commission	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	6.3
Committee Secretariat	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	4.2
Academics	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	4.2
scientists	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	4.2
Meetings	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	4.2
Constituency office	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Nowhere	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2.1
National governments	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.1
EP helpdesk	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.1
National Ministries	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
University	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Events	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
MEPs at events	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.1
National party	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Industry	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.1

12. Which people and organisations (internal and external) do you work with the most?									

	<1mnth	<3mnth	<6mnth	<1yr	<2yr	<3yr	>3yr	Total	%
Group Secretariat	1	0	2	2	3	0	5	13	27.1
Committee Secretariat	1	0	0	2	4	0	3	10	20.8
NPD assistants	1	6	1	0	1	1	0	10	20.8
Group policy advisors	1	0	1	1	5	0	2	10	20.8
Permanent Representations	1	1	1	0	3	1	2	9	18.8
Commission staff	0	1	0	2	2	1	2	8	16.7
NPD colleagues	0	3	1	1	1	1	0	7	14.6
MEP office staff	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	6	12.5
National Ministries	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	4	8.3
Group colleagues	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	8.3
National Party	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4	8.3
Embassies	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	6.3
Other assistants	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	3	6.3
Constituency office	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3	6.3
Missions to the EU	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4.2
National governments	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	4.2
EP secretariat	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	4.2
Regional authorities	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	4.2
Journalists	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	4.2
Citizens	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.1
MEPs working on dossiers	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.1
Committee colleagues	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2.1
INTEREST GROUPS	3	3	3	4	2	4	9	28	58.3
<i>Experts</i>	0	0	0	2	0	1	2	5	10.4
<i>Business representations</i>	0	0	2	0	2	1	2	7	14.6
<i>Consultancies</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.1
<i>National associations</i>	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	6	12.5
<i>European associations</i>	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	6.3
NGOs	2	2	0	1	1	1	3	10	20.8
<i>Think tanks</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4.2
<i>Lobbyists</i>	1	0	1	1	2	3	2	10	20.8
<i>PR agency</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.1
<i>Unions</i>	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4.2

Section 4: Inside the EP:

13. Who has the most influence over legislation in the EP?		
		%
<i>Blank</i>	3	6.3
Lobbies	8	16.7
the MEPs	8	16.7
Most active MEPs	7	14.6
Rapporteurs and shadows	7	14.6
Political Groups	6	12.5
Co-ordinators	5	10.4
Depends on the report	5	10.4
EPP	5	10.4
National govts	4	8.3
Commission	4	8.3
Assistants	3	6.3
Connection builders	3	6.3
2 largest groups	3	6.3
Big countries	2	4.2
ALDE	2	4.2
National parties	2	4.2
EP secretariat	1	2.1
PG leaders	1	2.1
Committee Chairs	1	2.1

Section 5: The MEPs:

14 What do you think makes a good MEP?		
		%
Personality	28	58.3
Active / Present	13	27.1
Speaking / Communication skills	12	25.0
Policy Expertise	8	16.7
Good Negotiator	6	12.5
Open minded	5	10.4
Good staff team	5	10.4
Balances interests	5	10.4
European view (not only national interest)	4	8.3
Political knowledge	4	8.3
Listens to voters	4	8.3
Compromising	3	6.3
Language skills	3	6.3
Remains a citizen	2	4.2
Attends committee	2	4.2
Focuses / specialises	2	4.2
Committed to Brussels	2	4.2
Networking skills	2	4.2
Has influence in the group	2	4.2

Blank	1	2.1
Respect	1	2.1
Not too close to lobbies	1	2.1
Leadership skills	1	2.1
Their ideas	1	2.1
Team worker	1	2.1
Co-operates / builds coalitions	1	2.1
Represent their member-state	1	2.1
Engages with the group	1	2.1

15. What factors help decide how your MEP votes?										
	EPP	S&D	ALDE	Greens	ECR	EFD	NI	Blank	Total	%
Group	7	9	8	4	1	0	0	0	29	60.4
Personal feeling/ conviction/ decision	5	3	5	2	4	0	0	1	20	41.7
Interest groups	1	2	3	2	0	1	0	0	9	18.8
NPD	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	8	16.7
Personal ideology	1	2	1	3	1	0	0	0	8	16.7
Assistant advice	0	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	6	12.5
Constituents	1	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	6	12.5
National party	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	6	12.5
National government	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	5	10.4
Research/ knowledge	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	4	8.3
National Interest	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Other PG positions	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Member-state position	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	6.3
Rapporteurs	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.2
PG advisors	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	4.2
Working group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.1
Press	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.1
European interest	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Whip	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2.1
Inter-group	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Random selection	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2.1
Blank	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Single factor	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	7	14.6
Two factors	2	6	2	4	2	1	1	0	18	37.5
Multiple factors	6	3	6	4	2	0	0	1	22	45.8

Section 6: The political groups:

16. How is the group voting line decided?										
	EPP	S&D	ALDE	Greens	ECR	EFD	NI	Blank	Total	%
Debate in the group	5	6	10	3	0	0	0	1	25	52.1
Rapporteurs/shadows	4	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	13	27.1
Working groups	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	10.4
Co-ordinators	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	10.4
I don't know	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	5	10.4
Secretariat	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	8.3
Key group players	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	4	8.3
Group MEPs in committee	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	4	8.3
Blank	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Policy advisors	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Rapporteur's assistant	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
National party policy	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	4.2
There is no group line	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4.2
Inter-group discussion	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	4.2
Leader guides	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.2
Democratically	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Copy closest group	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2.1
MEPs decide individually	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Blank	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Single factor	3	3	6	6	2	1	1	1	23	47.9
two factors	4	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	13	27.1
Multiple factors	1	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	9	18.8
TOTALS	9	10	14	8	4	1	1	1		

17. Who are the most important actors in your group?										
	EPP	S&D	ALDE	Greens	ECR	EFD	NI	Blank	Total	%
Group Leader	4	8	3	5	0	0	0	0	20	41.7
Co-ordinators	5	4	2	1	1	0	0	0	13	27.1
Policy advisors	2	1	4	0	1	0	0	0	8	16.7
Blank	1	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	5	10.4
Active MEPs	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	5	10.4
NPD leaders	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	10.4
Expert MEPs	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	5	10.4
all MEPs	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	4	8.3

Good assistants	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Group Presidency	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Group Bureau	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	6.3
Large NPDs	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.2
MEPs with positions	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	4.2
I don't know	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	4.2
EP President	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.2
Rapporteurs	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Depends on the topic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.1
Senior MEPs	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Working group chair	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Committee chairs	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
None	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2.1
Secretary-General	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.1
Blank	1	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	5	10.4
Single factor	1	2	4	3	3	0	1	1	15	31.3
two factors	5	4	3	5	0	0	0	0	17	35.4
Multiple factors	2	4	4	0	1	0	0	0	11	22.9

Section 7: Evaluation:

<i>18. If you could, what would you change about the EP?</i>			<i>20. Has working here changed your view of the EP or the EU?</i>		
		%			%
Blank	4	8.3	Blank	2	4.2
One seat (no Strasbourg session)	15	31.3	No	9	18.8
Less bureaucracy	7	14.6	Yes	37	77.1
Less waste	4	8.3			
More transparency	3	6.3	Yes - positively	17	45.9
Improve communications with citizens	3	6.3	Yes - negatively	7	18.9
Improve ICT services	3	6.3	No - remain positive	6	66.7
Improve meeting times and lengths	3	6.3	No - remain negative	0	0
Reduce role of national parties	3	6.3			
More concrete issues	2	4.2			
Involve civil society more	2	4.2			
Less declarations	2	4.2			

Less talk, more action	2	4.2				
Cut MEP expenses	2	4.2				
Pan European parties and elections	2	4.2				
Work with national parliaments	1	2.1				
More constituency time	1	2.1				
More media coverage	1	2.1				
Less collusion, more opposition	1	2.1				
Less MEPs	1	2.1				
Less committees	1	2.1				
Less social barriers	1	2.1				
Secretaries for MEPs	1	2.1				
More plenary speaking time	1	2.1				
Compulsory attendance	1	2.1				
Allow staff to speak in committee	1	2.1				
Less lobbying	1	2.1				
Improve public image	1	2.1				
Increase cross party relations	1	2.1				
Give MEPs right of initiative	1	2.1				

19. What are the most important things you feel you've learnt working here?		
		%
Blank	5	10.4
How the institutions and legislative process works	19	39.6
How politics works	11	22.9
Work relations	4	8.3
Multi-tasking	4	8.3
Self-learning	3	6.3
Communication	3	6.3
Policy knowledge	3	6.3
Negotiation	3	6.3
Importance of informal networks	3	6.3
Media lessons	2	4.2
Read between the lines	1	2.1
what MEPs do	1	2.1
Patience	1	2.1
You need English	1	2.1
To take a less national approach	1	2.1
Team work	1	2.1
Language skills	1	2.1
Networking skills	1	2.1

Section 8: AOB:

21. Do you have any other thoughts about the internal working of the EP?		
		%
Blank	28	58.3
Too bureaucratic	4	8.3
A good working environment	3	6.3
One seat problem	2	4.2
Democracy should be more than theory	1	2.1
Poor ICT facilities	1	2.1
Civil servants have too much power	1	2.1
Too many emails	1	2.1
Too much decided in working groups	1	2.1
EU needs to take credit for successes	1	2.1
Bad canteen food	1	2.1
Staff could easily be cut	1	2.1
EP should work to close the gap with citizens	1	2.1
Too much money is wasted	1	2.1
it is well organised	1	2.1
the collective action problem personified	1	2.1
Never enough time	1	2.1
22. Would you like to take part further in the research by giving a short interview?		
		%
Yes	19	39.6
No	24	50.0
Maybe	5	10.4